

“HERE WE CAN BEHOLD
THE GREAT MACHINE IN MOTION”:

THE BELFAST MONTHLY

MAGAZINE, 1808-1814

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ABSTRACT

As England's first colony, Ireland's experience is of great significance to wider colonial studies. Similarities exist between settler societies such as Australia, Canada and Ireland in terms of economic structures and demographic tensions; however the colonial experience of Ireland is unique as it was England's first colonial enterprise and therefore something of an ongoing experiment, and also because of its proximity to the home island. Nowhere else was England's appropriation of overseas territory followed by an attempt to amalgamate it into domestic lands.

This thesis discusses aspects of colonialism, political-religious dissent and education in Belfast in the immediate post-Union period (1801-1814). The commentary is couched in a study of *The Belfast Monthly Magazine*, a small publication that ran from 1808-1814 which provides a contemporary account of Belfast reformers who had witnessed the period of rebellion and union and continued to promote "real whig" principles in its aftermath. William Drennan (1754-1820) undertook the publishing venture jointly with John Templeton (1766-1825) and John Hancock (1762-1823). Drennan was a co-founder of the United Irishmen, Templeton was a well-known botanist and former United Irishman, and Hancock was a linen merchant and former member of the Society of Friends. The Proprietors, as they referred to themselves in their publication, reported on continental politics and their observations on the ongoing Napoleonic wars were largely informed by their experiences of civil unrest over the previous three decades.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

PERMISSION TO USE.....	i
ABSTRACT.....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iii
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	iv
FIGURES.....	v
1. “BLANK PAGES” AND “MENTAL FURNITURE:” IMPROVEMENT AND THE SETTLER CULTURE IN ULSTER.....	1
1.1 The Colonial Period in Ulster.....	4
1.2 The Writing Back Paradigm.....	9
1.3 Aims of the Proprietors: Writing Back and Arguing for Improvement.....	12
1.4 Background of the Proprietors: Men of Property and Integrity.....	14
2. “EDUCATION AND GOVERNMENT RULE THE SOUL OF MAN:” CONTENT OF <i>THE BELFAST MONTHLY MAGAZINE</i>	30
2.1 Audience and Authorship in <i>The Belfast Monthly Magazine</i>	31
2.2 <i>The Belfast Monthly Magazine</i> and Education in Ulster.....	35
2.3 Expressing Support for the Belfast Academical Institution.....	44
2.4 Hancock, Philanthropy and the Orders in Council.....	49
2.5 Old Conflicts and the Impending Mechanization of Linen.....	56
3. “THE LIGHT OF THE TIMES:” THE DEMISE OF LIBERALISM IN BELFAST.....	62
3.1 Liberalism, Public Opinion and Cessation of Publication.....	63
3.2 The Demise and Legacy of the Proprietors.....	75
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	78

FIGURES

1. "BENEATH ARE DEPOSITED ALL THAT REMAINS OF THE ONCE CELEBRATED ORDERS IN COUNCIL"	57
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**“BLANK PAGES” AND “MENTAL FURNITURE:”
IMPROVEMENT AND THE SETTLER CULTURE IN ULSTER**

Through the Act of Union in 1801, Ireland was forcibly united with England and Scotland and all its residents became subjects of the British Empire. This Union, such as it was, came in the wake of the Rebellion of 1798, a violent series of uprisings where a total of more than 25,000 people died, and was achieved through espionage and political manoeuvring rather than a response to the will of the people. It stifled political dissent without effectively shoring up Anglo-Irish support and the ongoing discrimination against Catholics continued unabated, making the Irish majority understandably reluctant to participate in, or even acknowledge, the new political environment. Having temporarily addressed the Irish situation, Westminster turned its focus to dealing with the problem of Napoleon, subjecting all of Great Britain to the Orders in Council in an attempt to conduct economic warfare.¹

The effects of instituting such a strategy impacted producing centres by accelerating the output of some while neglecting or hamstringing the supply and delivery networks of others. Like many other industrial towns, Belfast's growth and prosperity was thrown into disarray by the Orders in Council. The welfare of the entire community depended on its maintaining a robust linen industry, yet under the new restrictions obtaining flax supplies from America and the continent became increasingly difficult, endangering thousands of local jobs. Dedicated,

¹ For a summary of these events, see Davies, Norman. *The Isles: a history*. (Great Britain: Oxford University Publishing, 1999); Wilkinson, David, “How Did They Pass the Union?”: Secret Service Expenditure in Ireland, 1799-1804. *The Historical Association* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1997).

educated gentleman bent on developing the Belfast-Lagan Valley area into a industrial powerhouse were becoming increasingly disaffected by Westminster's interference with the Irish political and education systems. They desired an environment that supported international trading and the study of science but were aware that advocating increased independence was a foolhardy proposition.

By 1807, former United Irishmen William Drennan (1754-1820) was ready to publicly voice his concern and he did so through the publication he co-founded, *The Belfast Monthly Magazine*. The magazine was a literary enterprise that ran from 1808-1814 that Drennan helped design to articulate the concerns of Belfast reformers who had witnessed the period of rebellion and union. In the September 1808 issue he asserted: "This country deserves the attention of the intelligent at large, affording matters of great interest for political investigation: but to its inhabitants, it is of the utmost consequence also to weigh and consider its complicated situation; for their happiness and that of their posterity is at stake."² The magazine never achieved financial success, as Drennan's cohorts were few and his detractors many, and in the wake of the Rebellion the Ulster public was understandably wary of liberal ideals. Still, the existence and significance of *The Belfast Monthly Magazine* did not lie solely in its profit margin but in its pages, which reveal a liberal remnant persisting in Belfast after the Union. This remnant was steeped in Enlightenment principles and British "real Whig" ideology.

The three gentlemen who edited and published the magazine were creatures of the Enlightenment. Their interests and efforts clearly demonstrated that an Irish Enlightenment did indeed exist and was well underway. Although its presence should not be surprising, some scholars, including Maire Kennedy, report that such an idea continues to "raise some eyebrows."³ In fact, A.T.Q. Stewart has questioned the absence of Ireland in the historiography of the Enlightenment to date: "It is almost as if authors inhabiting so rarefied and

² "Editorial," *The Belfast Monthly Magazine (B.M.M.)* I (1808), 72-73.

³ Maire Kennedy, *French Books in Eighteenth-Century Ireland* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2001).

intellectual an atmosphere dread some kind of devaluation if they mention the homeland of Sloane, Berkeley, Toland, Swift and Hutcheson” he caustically remarks, “nor do the Irish take much interest in the Enlightenment; they prefer to remember the Age of the Protestant Ascendancy, the penal law, and the 1798 rebellion.”⁴

This thesis is an exploration of the personalities and issues surrounding *The Belfast Monthly Magazine*, emphasizing the relationship between the personal backgrounds of the Proprietors, as they came to refer to themselves, and the nature of the magazine’s content which is quite broad and rather controversial for the time. Along with publishing bits of fiction and poetry, they agitated for the establishment of non-denominational education, petitioned for relief from the Orders in Council, and provided an assortment of articles on scientific innovation and moral improvement. Of particular interest are the ongoing contemporary accounts that provide a unique view of Britain’s involvement in the Napoleonic wars – the opinions expressed being largely informed by the writers’ personal experiences with three decades of civil unrest – and in its farewell issue, readers were provided with a remarkable commentary on the nature and potential of the public as an entity in Ireland.

By examining the content of and personalities involved in *The Belfast Monthly Magazine*, this study investigates one of the most conflicted and ambivalent groups in post-Union Ireland. The liberal remnant in Belfast was generally Protestant and contained a strong dissenting element, yet it was also wealthy and maintained undeniable social, political and economic ties to the Anglican land-owning ascendancy. They could be both revolutionary and pacifist. Their support of Catholic emancipation was vehement but rooted in English Commonwealth principles and did not extend to embracing Catholic society. Their disgust with the parliamentary system and so-called English arrogance arose from the same colonial situation that afforded their middle-class education and lifestyle. I am seeking to shed light on the so-called mental world, mental

⁴ A.T.Q. Stewart, *The Shape of Irish History* (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 2001), 110.

furniture and even mental lumber that the colonizers were purported to carry through a discussion of this remnant. Generally, the voice of the reforming Irish has been better preserved in the literature of Ulster⁵ as opposed to the historical accounts. Studies of sources such as *The Belfast Monthly Magazine* are dwarfed by research on more sensational events, including the Rebellion of 1798 and the rise of the Orange System. However, by welding together traditional biography with aspects the “writing-back paradigm” proposed by post-colonial theorists, a glimpse of the identity and mentality of the post-union liberal remnant can be discerned through this discussion. What follows is a short summary of a few, mainstream historical accounts and theories that can place the Proprietor’s activities in the context of their society.

1.1 The Colonial Period in Ulster

The colonial period in Ireland was characterized by ongoing, rapidly paced change. These changes did not generally occur through organized agitation for reform but through planned improvement and intermittent violent episodes that shifted policy directions. The classic account of the colonial economy in Ulster is Conrad Gill’s study of the linen industry, published in 1925.⁶ While Gill’s command of the intricacies of linen production and his summary of the available sources is unassailable, his progressive interpretation of the “rise” of linen has been criticized as being teleological.⁷ The basic political and economic situation that provides the backdrop for this thesis is provided for by several economic and political histories on Ulster published in the mid-twentieth century that still stand

⁵ See T. O. McLoughlin, *Contesting Ireland: Irish Voices against England in the Eighteenth Century* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1999); Flann Campbell, *The Dissenting Voice: Protestant Democracy in Ulster from Plantation to Partition* (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 1991); Patricia Craig, *The Rattle of the North: An Anthology of Ulster Prose* (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 1992).

⁶ Conrad Gill, *The Rise of the Irish Linen Industry* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1925).

⁷ Marilyn Cohen, *The Warp of Ulster's Past*, 1st ed. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997).

remarkably intact: these include E.R.R. Green's *The Lagan Valley*; Constantia Maxwell's *Country and Town in Ireland Under the Georges*; and Caroline Robbins' *The Eighteenth-Century Commonwealthman*.⁸

In 1949, E.R.R. Green sketched out the transformation of the Lagan Valley from a Gaelic stronghold to British "corridor of communications"⁹ between Belfast and the southern half of the Lough Neagh basin. Green decided that the seventeenth century witnessed "something much more important take place than the destruction of one aristocracy and its replacement by another; an economic revolution had begun...built on the firm foundation of protestant English or Scots settlers tilling the rich agricultural lands."¹⁰ The subsequent colonial era has been described by Constantia Maxwell as bearing "many resemblances to France as she existed before the French Revolution" and the presiding Anglo-Irish community as "being the most powerful in the country" but also the most progressive.¹¹ While noting the many faults of the class and the period, Maxwell identified "many good landlords and public-spirited philanthropists among [the Anglo-Irish]," individuals who "linked Ireland up with Europe, and even provided the most able and daring leaders for the Nationalist movement."¹² It is arguable that a single, clear path exists stretching from the first planters, Green's firm foundation, to Maxwell's philanthropists, who were the reforming landlords of the Georgian era. These historians both indicate a mental framework of the settler society that was based on early modern concepts of progress and improvement.

⁸ E. R. R. Green, *The Lagan Valley, 1800-1850; a Local History of the Industrial Revolution*, vol. 3, *Studies in Irish History* (London: Faber & Faber, 1949); Constantia Elizabeth Maxwell, *Country and Town in Ireland under the Georges*, rev. ed. (Dundalk: Dundalgan Press, W. Tempest, 1949); Caroline Robbins, *The Eighteenth-Century Commonwealthman: Studies in the Transmission, Development, and Circumstance of English Liberal Thought from the Restoration of Charles II until the War with the Thirteen Colonies* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1961).

⁹ Green, *The Lagan Valley, 1800-1850; a Local History of the Industrial Revolution*, 17-19.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Maxwell, *Country and Town in Ireland under the Georges*, 7.

¹² Ibid.

Improvement indirectly indicates measurement, which suggests a need for some sort of baseline. To measure Gaelic normality would be to acknowledge it. Since this was a society that did not value the Gaelic past, they could not use anything resembling the modern concept of “business as usual.” Instead, their baseline was an imaginary blank page. Sarah Barber has analyzed the use of the phrases “blank paper” and “white paper” in early modern Ireland, attributing its use to two general categories of people she referred to as the “administrators” and the “thinkers.”¹³ The administrators were charged with imposing order and peace, placing their focus on designing structures and institutions. They would employ utopian rhetoric, but were generally satisfied if local Irish would only attend an Anglican church service. The thinkers viewed Ireland as a means to study human nature and were often of Irish background and culture themselves. Thinkers sought to understand and maintain a more ordered environment by coming to terms with the sources of disorder.¹⁴ Leo Salinger has discussed a settlement metaphor found in Sir Francis Bacon’s *The Advancement of Science*, where Bacon wrote that plantations such as those in Ireland usually required a radical “clearing of the ground” for building and sowing.¹⁵ Bacon preferred plantation in a “pure soil,” by which he meant unpopulated areas, “for else it is rather an extirpation than a plantation.”¹⁶ Plantation in most of Ulster was the former and even the

¹³ Sarah Barber, ““Nothing but the First Chaos”: Making Sense of Ireland,” *Seventeenth-Century* 14, no. 1 (1999), 24-42.

¹⁴ Ibid, 28. The *virtuosos* were advocates of universal knowledge and believed that a vast network of scholars, clerics and scientists could be created and centred on an Office of Address, which would receive ideas, process them and establish links between previously isolated seekers of truth. Barber’s category of thinkers is roughly equivalent to the scheming *virtuosi* who corresponded with Samuel Hartlib.

¹⁵ Leo Salinger, “The Social Setting” in Boris Ford, ed., *The New Pelican Guide to English Literature*, Revised and Expanded ed. ed. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982).

¹⁶ Ibid.

more gradual development of counties Antrim and Down also amounted to an extirpation.¹⁷

John Foster built on Salinger's comments and reversed the typical metaphor; rather than dwelling on how the mental landscape was formed, Foster mused that "the clearing of the Irish landscape, like the first clearance in the English settlements in North America, occurred during the clearing away of Renaissance and pre-Renaissance mental lumber by the Elizabethan and Jacobean new philosophers."¹⁸ Bernhard Klein focused even earlier and incorporated the earliest maps in Ireland into the larger discussions of improvement and colonialism, identifying the locating and naming of territory as an essential preparatory step for possession, control and mastery. He found that from the planter's point of view "the defining principle of the landscape was not the immediacy of the rural world, but the barbarous rebel who mistreated and wrongfully tyrannized Irish soil."¹⁹ He referred to settlers' maps depicting plantation towns as being an exercise where "[t]opographical concerns disappear behind the attempt to display the planters' material achievements and the configuration of their mental world..."²⁰ As part of his premise Klein invoked John Hale, who claimed that in early modern Europe "[maps] became part of the mental furniture of educated men."²¹ If Hale's phrase about "mental furniture" is taken a little further, it can be argued that the minds of the planters and their descendants were filled with notions about the potential of science, the improvement of society through its application, and the necessity of bringing Ireland into the Union. Two centuries later, when Union finally did occur, the

¹⁷ John Wilson Foster, "Encountering Traditions," in John Wilson Foster and Helena C. G. Chesney, eds., *Nature in Ireland: A Scientific and Cultural History* (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 1997), 46.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid, 61.

²⁰ Ibid, 129. See also Michael Biggs, "Putting the State on the Map: Cartography, Territory, and European State Formation," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 41, no. 2 (1999), 374-405.

²¹ J. R. Hale, *The Civilization of Europe in the Renaissance* (London: HarperCollins, 1993), 16. Quoted in Bernhard Klein, *Maps and the Writing of Space in Early Modern England and Ireland* (St. Martin's Press, 2001), 7.

mental world of their descendants also contained a carefully constructed mental transcript of the region's history which catalogued the massacres of the seventeenth century and the rise of the institutions they relied on including linen boards, canals and road systems, and the parliamentary system. Furthermore, they would have known a great deal about the excesses of their dual society and the problems of the oppressed Catholic majority. But most importantly, they viewed all these issues through the lens of ongoing Improvement, a concept that clearly survived from the earliest days of Plantation and was continually invoked in the post-Union period.

Liberals in the revolutionary and post-Union period would come to use the ideals of the planters, thinkers and the related category of "commonwealthmen" as their own baseline by which to measure improvements or reform, which came to be almost interchangeable terms. Caroline Robbins invoked the term "commonwealthmen" to discuss the reformers in her 1961 study. She described pre-Union Ireland as being "[t]orn by internal feuds between conquered and conqueror, as well as by rivalries in the Protestant Ascendancy, administered and restricted by a government external to the country and unsympathetic to its troubles."²² Robbins created a study of concerned reformers "who were to be found in dissenters' meetings and in certain country houses..."²³ and while acknowledging that they only rarely made any impact on the politics of the day, participating divines and teachers produced a body of writing that maintained English principles and educated a second generation of commonwealthmen.²⁴ This next generation was charged with preserving the study of seventeenth century classics and the arguments and essays of the post-Revolution period. The Proprietors of *The Belfast Monthly Magazine* were part of this generation.

²² Robbins, *The Eighteenth-Century Commonwealthman: Studies in the Transmission, Development, and Circumstance of English Liberal Thought from the Restoration of Charles II until the War with the Thirteen Colonies*, 134.

²³ Ibid, 6.

²⁴ Ibid, 7. The general association of the eighteenth-century Commonwealthmen with the Levellers and republicans did little for their public image, for it suggested that they could not be good subjects.

Irish circumstances in the last decades of the eighteenth century stimulated the development and spread of liberal ideas, and the new generation embraced the commonwealthman's cause with fervour. Many Irish reformers and pro-Americans of the age of George III spent their formative years under teachers at Glasgow and considered themselves unequivocal heirs of the Independents.²⁵ William Drennan, for example, gloried in being the son of Thomas Drennan (d.1768), and Robbins deftly sketched out the web of kinship that bound together Drennan, Senior with other dissenting intellectuals such as James Arbuckle (d.1747), John Abernethy (1680-1740), Francis Hutcheson (1694-1746), William Bruce (1702-1755) and Samuel Haliday (1685-1739) as "they witnessed each other's wills, they often educated each other's children, and they read each other's books."²⁶ They sought the "good life," which Arbuckle described in the *Hibernicus Letters* (Robbins referred to it as an Irish *Spectator*) as including the development of literary taste through the study of not only Shaftesbury, Molesworth and Locke, but also Temple, Milton, Fenelon, Montaigne, Grotius, Longinus and Machiavelli. Arbuckle felt that education was important in any state, but particularly in Ireland, where "good education and the encouragement of learning were necessary for those who wished to improve conditions."²⁷

1.2 The Writing Back Paradigm

The writing-back paradigm was proposed and explored in the mid-1980s by a small, pioneering group of critics and theorists mainly from Australia and Canada. It became codified in 1989 with the publication of *The Empire Writes Back* and has since become a staple tool of literary analysis for many critics writing on the new literatures in English.²⁸ Their discourse on "rewriting strategies" is geared towards dismantling, subverting or deconstructing the imperial master-narratives

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid, 168.

²⁷ Ibid, 172.

²⁸ Stephen Slemon, "Unsettling the Empire: Resistance Theory for the Second World," *World Literature Written in English* 30:2 (1990), 30-34.

of the former colonial centres. Unlike cultural nationalist theories, the writing-back paradigm focuses on intertextual relationships that transcend mere opposition to the colonizers' discourses.²⁹ The result has not been anything resembling a consensus, however. For example, whereas David Cairns and Sean Richards identified and explored a general discourse where the "reality of the historical relationship of Ireland with England [dominates]; a relationship of the colonized and the colonizer,"³⁰ Julian Moynahan argued that "an entire colony gets cut off from its extraterritorial roots, becoming as Irish as everybody else, though the cultural contribution it makes remain distinctive."³¹ Because of this, Moynahan decided that the Irish literature of the eighteenth-century is "not Irish enough. It is an offshoot of English writing."³² Furthermore, the Rebellion and Act of Union was "a closing argument between the imperial English and Ireland, 'the recalcitrant colony.'"³³ He closed his preface commenting that the "ism" in colonialism does not apply to his study; instead his collection of writers, spanning Maria Edgeworth (1768-1849) to W.B. Yeats (1865-1939), were presented as "offspring from a colony that was cancelled and cancelled itself through the Act of Union in 1800."³⁴ Moynahan's position may not be as simple and accurate as it appears. The Irish administration operated under a colonial mentality, which is something of a truism since Ireland was a colony, but what it implies is far less mundane. Colonialism is tied into the idea of captive markets, and that unique

²⁹ Nationalist theories see literary texts primarily in terms of a reassertion of cultural roots and the emergence of new national culture, see Frank Schulze-Engler, "Exceptionalist Temptations—Disciplinary Constraints: Postcolonial Theory and Criticism," *European Journal of English Studies* 6, no. 3 (2002), 289-305.

³⁰ David Cairns and Shaun Richards, *Writing Ireland: Colonialism, Nationalism, and Culture, Cultural Politics* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988). Their definition of discourse includes "a linguistic unity or group of statements which constitutes and delimits a particular area of concern, governed by its own rules of formation with its own modes of distinguishing truth from reality." (preface).

³¹ Julian Moynahan, *Anglo-Irish: The Literary Imagination in a Hyphenated Culture* (Princeton University Press, 1995), 7.

³² *Ibid*, 4.

³³ *Ibid*.

³⁴ *Ibid*, xiii.

aspect of Ireland which involved the supposed incorporation of Ireland into Britain's domestic territory makes things much more complex. In spite of Ireland's new status as a British entity, an institutional apparatus was available which enabled the government to interfere with a relatively free hand. The apparatus had been built up through many decades of penal laws and economic manipulations and, in Donald Akenson's view, this colonial mentality made it likely that the state would intervene in certain matters such as education.³⁵ Any intervention was done on a level that could never have been approached in England and this practice undermined the concept of a single Great Britain that encompassed both islands. Akenson has discerned that Union did not "destroy, or even moderate, the colonial mentality under which Ireland was governed."³⁶

Writing back strategists also challenged simplistic dichotomies of colonizer and colonized. For example, Brian Friel's play, *Translations*, challenged the nineteenth-century Ordnance Survey from the Gaelic point of view, presenting the map-making project as a initiative that deliberately accelerated the imposition of English as the dominant language in Ireland.³⁷ The play was directly inspired by J.H. Andrews' history *A Paper Landscape* and prompted a retort from Andrews where he explained that Irish names were not simply translated to English, as Friel had suggested, and that direct translation was relatively rare. Instead, Irish names were altered mainly through the processes of dictation in which a non-Irish speaker recorded a place-name spoken by an Irish-speaker in English orthography and then converted to English words that partially matched the sound of the Irish name-elements but obviously not the meaning. New English names were introduced, but mostly for market towns, country houses, villages and farms newly established through the Plantation. Andrews' retort did not criticize the play's aesthetic appeal or the claim that power, authority and mapping are linked, but he did suggest that Friel

³⁵ Donald H. Akenson, *The Irish Education Experiment; the National System of Education in the Nineteenth Century, Studies in Irish History* (London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1970), 37.

³⁶ Ibid, 39.

³⁷ Brian Friel, *Translations: A Play* (New York: S. French, 1981).

oversimplified the intent and execution of the Ordnance Survey project. It was particularly significant to proponents of “writing back” strategies that researchers were able to use these substitutions as clues to the original Gaelic names and therefore the maps, ironically, also provided a way to revive of the Gaelic world.³⁸

1.3 Aims of the Proprietors: Writing Back and Arguing for Improvement

As we have seen, the early modern colonists viewed their exploits in Ireland as occurring against “blank paper,” “white paper,” and creating “paper landscapes.” It is both significant and appropriate, then, that two hundred years later a Belfast publication would endeavour to rescue the dying spirit of Improvement through the publication of a magazine, seeking to lay rest to the “black page”³⁹ of the revolutionary period by achieving a reasonable public consensus on the need for educational and parliamentary reform. This was the intent and wording employed by *The Belfast Monthly Magazine*. While the attempt was largely unsuccessful and the enterprise was eventually abandoned, the Proprietors maintained hope that despite the cessation of publication, their liberal values would survive and embellish the next chapter of history by way of what they referred to as “these elements of a public, this alphabet of people.”⁴⁰

The fundamental issues of the Proprietors reflected the primacy of the established colonial economy in their society. The Ulster economy was stronger than southern Ireland at the time but was neither diversified nor mechanized. Much of the malaise being reported on revolves around the proposed mechanization of linen. The protest against the Orders in Council was part of a drive to support linen production by use of the handloom and their interest in the poor was usually about accommodating these increasingly marginalized

³⁸ C. Nash explores the views of Andrews and compares Ireland’s experience with place-naming practices in Canada, see Catherine Nash, “Irish Placenames: Post-Colonial Locations,” *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 24, no. 4 (1999), 465.

³⁹ “For the Belfast Monthly Magazine,” *B.M.M.* Vol. I (1809), 138.

⁴⁰ “Monthly Retrospect,” *B.M.M.* Vol. XIII (1814), 513.

handloom weavers. As Chapter Three will explain, a sense of an era ending pervades all the commentary provided by the magazine, and the time when Ulster society was interested in liberalism had passed. The next rise of republicanism would be modern militant, and solely focused on Irish Catholic emancipation. Their body of work, as a whole, confirms that the mental framework of the Proprietors involved defending and reforming a progressive, British Ireland. Their writings reflected discomfiture with Catholicism and a continuing adherence to the shrine of Improvement on both an individual and societal level. Their vision of Ireland had been created out of what they perceived as a Gaelic-Catholic wilderness transformed into a thriving, semi-industrial linen economy, and while they supported Catholic emancipation, it was based on their heritage of Robbins' "commonwealthmen" principles rather than taking a cue from the French radicals.⁴¹ The liberal remnant in Belfast felt that their ethnic, spiritual and intellectual brethren were to be found across the Irish Sea, as opposed to the continent, and their understanding of the Enlightenment was through this filter.

The Proprietors of *The Belfast Monthly Magazine* were Protestant colonials who expressed a desire for Ireland to maintain a level of independence from the rest of Britain, yet this aspiration was compromised by the need for dissenters and scientists to travel to other parts of Britain in order to obtain a higher education. The linen industry in Ulster owed both its origins and its main customers to the proximity of the larger island and generally benefited from greater integration with Britain, so long as the colonial mentality of the administration was kept in check. In this way, the fortunes and aspirations of the liberal remnant and of the linen barons who were still managing to prosper in the Lagan Valley could support but also frustrate each other, although both views sought a solution in the improvement of education. On a practical level, the linen barons depended upon continual innovations in machinery, chemical bleaching techniques and financing. The reformers required "curiosity, imagination,

⁴¹ Robbins, *The Eighteenth-Century Commonwealthman: Studies in the Transmission, Development, and Circumstance of English Liberal Thought from the Restoration of Charles II until the War with the Thirteen Colonies*.

education and the opportunity to exchange ideas,”⁴² in order to promote their concept of economics and citizenship. The overlap in the objectives of the linen barons and of the liberal remnant was extensive. A short discussion of the interconnections between these circles of business and politics follows, which will add nuance to the stridency often expressed in *The Belfast Monthly Magazine*.

1.4 Background of the Proprietors: Men of Property and Integrity

In 1807, William Drennan, a radical from Ulster who is credited with being the first to refer to Ireland as “the Emerald Isle,”⁴³ announced he was returning to settle in his hometown. For two decades he had preferred to stay in Dublin where he had promoted the cause of the Volunteers and co-founded the United Irishmen. In fact, he had hitherto insisted he disliked Belfast and that nothing would induce him to return. It seems that his sudden relocation was mostly due to a recent inheritance, and perhaps also from a desire to be near his sister, Martha McTier, who had custody of his eldest son since infancy. His arrival also indicated a growing disaffection with Dublin, which was not nearly as exciting as it had been during the 1790s and where his medical practice was failing. In a letter to Martha, he expressed optimism about the move:

I think my fortune would tell better in several respects in Belfast, at rather less expense, and place me and my family in a better situation in society than I can ever be, as I am connected in Dublin. As to the social intercourse of men, and literary men, I have none, and my chief entertainment in that way is going for an hour in the day to a library and newsroom, which are to be had everywhere at this time.⁴⁴

⁴² Helena Chesney, “Enlightenment and Education,” in Foster and Chesney, eds., *Nature in Ireland: A Scientific and Cultural History*, 375.

⁴³ William Drennan, *Fugitive Pieces, in Verse and Prose* (Belfast: Printed by F.D. Finlay; and sold by R. Rees, London; H. Fitzpatrick, Capel-Street, Dublin; and S. Archer, Belfast, 1815).

⁴⁴ William Drennan to Martha McTier, 29 June 1807. William Drennan et al., *The Drennan-Mctier Letters* (Dublin: Women's History Project in association with the Irish Manuscripts Commission, 1998), 609.

Upon his arrival, Drennan set about publishing some of his writings, joining committees to establish the non-denominational Belfast Academical Institute and starting up *The Belfast Monthly Magazine*. Drennan's involvement with the school had been enthusiastic ever since its initial proposal, which he only attended because he considered it a "duty to hear the merits of any plan which proposes to do public service to the interests of education" and because he felt "staying away would...show a party disposition more than going." He left with the determination to "listen and learn" and returned believing the "report appeared well drawn-up."⁴⁵ The literary project was a diversion he undertook jointly with John Templeton (1766-1825) and John Hancock (1762-1823). Templeton, Drennan and Hancock likely concocted the plan as they attended meetings to establish the Institution.⁴⁶

The trio of Proprietors who assembled to publish *The Belfast Monthly Magazine* embody that sense of stridency, and demonstrate the need to contextualize writings from settler colonials. Their backgrounds are very telling: all were Ulstermen, very close in age, well educated and from the upper middle class. All were impressionable young men at the time of the French Revolution and since that point, they had witnessed the rise of the Volunteers, the birth of the Orangemen, the Rebellion of 1798, the Union of 1800 and were reporting on what would be the last portion of the Napoleonic wars. They were also all professionals: a businessman, a doctor and a zoologist. Yet, the differences between them indicate that political and intellectual upheaval was changing Ulster society. Their educational backgrounds reflect a certain amount of diversity within the ascendancy, but their religions even more so – that the Proprietors consisted of an ex-Quaker, a Presbyterian and an Anglican is significant. Such an

⁴⁵ Either Templeton and Hancock were not at the first meeting or they were not considered to be consequential.

⁴⁶ Martha McTier mentioned Hancock in a letter in 1803, so it is possible they had made acquaintance previously. It does seem that they traveled in different social circles, because unlike Templeton or their mutual friend, Dr. Robert Tennant, Hancock's name does not recur in Drennan's lengthy correspondence with his sister, and their rather large networks of friends and business associates rarely cross.

alliance, even for a small publication, would not have been possible a century earlier or have been likely in the Ulster of their youth. The mixture exemplifies how diversity among the Protestants was becoming overshadowed by a dichotomy between Protestants and Catholics.

The Proprietors' politics are also a study of similarities and of contrasts. They were all liberals, yet Hancock was pro-union and sought reform from within; Drennan was a co-founder of the United Irishmen but in his later years remained distant from the organization; Templeton, on the other hand, kept company with distinctly seditious men even in the post-Union period although he was never himself in conflict with the law. The Proprietors did not claim that their rhetoric was the only right way of think, but instead remained committed to the process of political discussion. They were willing to discuss, object and dissent in a time when such activities were decidedly dangerous. They were insiders who preferred to be thought of as outsiders.

John Templeton made his living at the wholesale trade but today is remembered as one of the earliest, most distinguished and original of Irish zoologists. James O'Connor has referred to him as the "doyen" of Irish natural history,⁴⁷ as Templeton embodied the ongoing natural history project in Ireland. Templeton was educated privately and his means enabled him to devote himself entirely to the study of local botany and zoology. As a young man, his reputation as a botanist came to the notice of Joseph Banks (1743-1820), who offered to take him to New Holland (Australia), promising a good salary and a large grant of land. Instead, Templeton laid out an experimental garden of the family estate at Cranmore, in what is now the Malone Conservation area near Belfast.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ James O'Connor, "Insects and Entomology," in Foster and Chesney, eds., *Nature in Ireland: A Scientific and Cultural History*, 226.

⁴⁸ Donal Synnott, "Botany in Ireland," in *ibid*, 168. Cranmore House still stands in the grounds of the Royal Belfast Academical Institute playing fields and is considered to be the earliest surviving house in the Belfast area. In 1690, during a storm on the march to the Boyne, King William found shelter there with the resident of the time (John Eccles) and the house was known for a time as "Orange Grove." Templeton revamped the landscaping, planting many of the exotic trees that are still to be found on the property.

Templeton travelled in the same circles as Belfast “quality” including the Joys, the MacCrackens and the Drennans; his wife was Katherine Johnston, sister to Margaret, the wife of United Irishmen martyr Henry Munro; as well, he was close friends with Edward Bunting (1773-1843), a well-known pedagogue and collector of Irish Gaelic music.⁴⁹ His closest friend, Thomas Russell (1767-1803), was a co-founder of the United Irishmen. Russell had roots in County Cork but settled in Dublin upon his return from a military posting in India in 1776 in order to pursue studies in science, philosophy and politics. In 1790 he accepted a posting as an officer in the garrison at Belfast, where he soon fell in with the local liberal faction. He left the army and was in attendance at a convention of the Whig Club the next year, where Drennan first proposed a brotherhood that would “go further than speculate or debate ... and come to grips with practicalities.” Russell relayed the developments in Belfast to his friend, the Irish rebel Theobald Wolfe Tone (1763-1798), and within weeks Tone published his *Argument on Behalf of the Catholics of Ireland*. The inaugural meeting of the Society of United Irishmen followed; Templeton joined immediately.

In 1792 Templeton was part of an influx of new members to the Belfast Reading Society. They renamed the group to the Belfast Society for Promoting Knowledge, which later became the Linenhall Library. Templeton prepared a catalogue of the society’s holdings with Rev. James Bryson, publishing the catalogue in April of 1793. Russell took a position as librarian with the group in 1794, but continued to maintain a high profile within the United Irishmen. Due to this involvement with the secret society, he was imprisoned and therefore did not take part in the rebellion. He effectively remained a political prisoner until 1802,

⁴⁹ For more on Bunting’s work, see Leith Davis, “Sequels of Colonialism: Edward Bunting’s Ancient Irish Music,” *Nineteenth-Century Contexts*, no. 23 (2001), 29-57. Bunting started his collection when James McDonnell, Robert Bradshaw, Henry Joy and Thomas Russell recruited his services as an organist for a local music festival in 1792. Davis claims they were engaged in creating a national fiction in the manner suggested by Anderson in *Imagined Communities* but with the ambivalence argued by “writing back” strategists. See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Rev. and extended ed. (New York: Virgo, 1991).

never actually facing charges for a crime and being transported between prisons in Ulster and Scotland. Upon his release he was transported to Hamburg;⁵⁰ from Hamburg Russell made his way to Paris where he found Robert Emmet planning another insurrection. Russell returned to Ireland in March 1803 intending to organize the North but found the area thoroughly subdued. Emmet was arrested in Dublin, and Russell attempted a rescue but was captured in the process. Russell was found guilty of high treason on the evidence of local witnesses and was hanged and beheaded in October 1803. Templeton continued to write to Russell as he awaited execution:

Every walk I take in the pursuit of beauties of nature, brings to my recollection similar excursion in your company—every rare fossil that I meet with, and curious plant that I observe, causes me to find the want of my friend. Often does my imagination dwell with pleasure on the picturesque scenery of Glenave, and the still more sublime rock of Rathlin, neither can I go into my garden and view the little healthy banks you so often admitted, without remembering the pleasure I received from your praises of my ingenuity in forming it.⁵¹

At the time, Martha McTier wrote to her brother (Drennan) that “Russell's fortitude was conspicuous, his speech was eloquent and affecting.”⁵² She then recounted a priest arguing with some of the locals in a coffeehouse; he was holding up the example of the doctor who informed on Russell as sacrificing private friendship to the public good when John Hancock, alone in a corner, lifted his eyes from his newspaper and queried “And wouldst thee wish for such a friend?”⁵³

Hancock had witnessed the turmoil that occurred during the Rebellion of 1798, but, unlike Drennan and Templeton, Hancock was not part of the Volunteer

⁵⁰ Hamburg was the most important outpost of the Franco-Irish alliance and hosted the only United Irish Society outside the British Isles. Therefore, Hamburg also became a focus of British espionage.

⁵¹ Mary McNeill, “The United Irishmen” in Mary McNeill, *The Life and Times of Mary Ann McCracken, 1770-1866: A Belfast Panorama* (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 1997).

⁵² Drennan et al., *The Drennan-McTier Letters*, 167.

⁵³ Ibid.

or United Irishmen movements. Instead, he had endured his own political and familial struggles during the period of unrest and emerged from the cloistered Quaker Community in Ulster around the time of Union.⁵⁴ He began expressing his political and moral ideology through *The Belfast Monthly Magazine*, an enterprise to which he was very much dedicated to and heavily involved in – arguably more so than the other two Proprietors. Due to this considerable contribution to the magazine, and because information on Templeton and Drennan is more readily available, a more thorough discussion of Hancock’s background is included here. The exposure to conflict that Hancock experienced in his youth prepared him well for the conflict he would face as part of the controversial and often maligned liberal remnant.

Hancock’s family had been involved in several internal squabbles within the Society of Friends. His father’s will had left funds for the establishment of a grammar school that also set the stage for a community-wide argument over a schoolteacher; created a situation within their family that nearly dragged his heir into a bankruptcy scandal; and the school itself served as the physical setting for a later split amongst the body of Friends over marital practices. Hancock’s expressive, inflexible personality seems to be derived from his familiarity with internal dispute. Hancock’s background also largely predicted his interest in science and the establishment of new educational institutions. In colonial Ireland, Quakers and other Dissenting communities were denied access to schools under the control of the established church. Recognizing that such schools greatly enhance the church’s power and influence and, moreover, limited the prospects of their own children, Dissenters created alternatives where it was possible to mould the attitudes and skills of future generations, and sought to provide a high

⁵⁴ For an overview of the Quaker community during this time period, see Glynn Douglas, *Friends and 1798: Quaker Witness to Non-Violence in 18th Century Ireland*, (Dublin: Historical Committee of the Religious Society of Friends in Ireland, 1998)

standard of education in their academies, particularly in the sciences.⁵⁵ Quakers endorsed the study of the natural world as a legitimate activity; a positive sanction all the more significant, given the many activities prohibited for strict adherents.⁵⁶ During the transition between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Quakers founded many schools and by the late eighteenth century a number of British Quaker schools possessed scientific equipment and offered limited education in the sciences, often by employing visiting lecturers.⁵⁷

John Hancock's father, a wealthy merchant and conservative Quaker, had indicated shortly before his death that the founding of a school in "our poor Province" had been in his mind for some time and while he had hoped that the wider body of Irish Friends might allow funds for a schoolhouse in Ulster, in the absence of that impetus he would provide for it in his will.⁵⁸ He died shortly thereafter, leaving five executors to manage his affairs while his son was in minority; they included William Nevill (his brother-in-law), John Hill, Robert Bradshaw, Jacob Hancock (his brother, still in his minority) and Thomas Greer of Dungannon. The funds bequeathed to the school came with specific conditions and the details of the will, already difficult to fulfil, were compounded by the strong and somewhat difficult personalities of the executors. The will contained

⁵⁵ Geoffrey Cantor, "Real Disabilities? Quakers Schools as Nurseries of Science," in Paul Wood, *Science and Dissent in England, 1688-1945, Science, Technology, and Culture, 1700-1945* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), 147.

⁵⁶ Ibid, 150-1.

⁵⁷ Cantor, 152. In England, Bootham and (to a lesser extent) other Quaker schools functioned as "nurseries," providing their pupils with hand-on experience of science, and were directly responsible for the relatively large number of Quakers who practised science during the later half of the nineteenth century. Cantor has noted the irony of Quakers, who laboured under so-called disabilities in the area of education, ultimately receiving a "far better science education than did the vast majority of Anglicans." (ibid).

⁵⁸ John Hancock Sr. to Thomas Greer, 1761. *Correspondence of the Greer Family of Dungannon, Co. Tyrone*. Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI) D1044/850. Hancock Sr. notes the "memorial shall have manifested the disposition of my heart, perhaps someone may be spirited up to promote it." (ibid). See also Nevill H. Newhouse. "A History of Friends School." (Place Published: Lisburn Historical Society, no date), <http://www.lisburn.com/books/friends-school/friends-school11.htm#ONE> (accessed March 20, 2005).

directions to “purchase lands...within the present bounds of Lisburn Mens’ Meeting for the education of the youth of the people called Quakers,”⁵⁹ therefore requiring protracted negotiations with the Earl of Hertford. Arrangements were finally made to use a portion of land belonging to James Hunter, who was Hancock’s maternal grandfather, making the school even more of a family affair.⁶⁰

A “suitable master”⁶¹ was found in John Gough of Kendal, a product of Friars Meeting House in Bristol.⁶² He filled the requirements nicely but a nasty internal conflict emerged when he passed away and his son made claims to be taking over. Such a progression was not unusual for the times but the executors were not impressed with the disposition or abilities of the son and Hancock Senior’s will expressly stated that a student should have been trained for the position instead. The young man sent out letters and pamphlets and made an attempt to start up classes on schedule but was soon ejected from the community. The extent of John Hancock Junior’s involvement in this affair is somewhat obscure: while no confirmation of where John went to school is available, Nevill Newhouse believes it was also to Friar’s, where both Hancock Senior and the executors of the will had connections and where his son made numerous trips to visit afterwards.⁶³ Hancock and Gough were friends and if Newhouse is correct about Hancock attending Alexander Ascot’s school, both boys were at Friars in

⁵⁹ Will of John Hancock Senior, Box 2553, PRONI, Belfast.

⁶⁰ The actual ownership of the released land was not clarified until 1767, just a year after local labourers threatened to strike and James Hunter and James Hogg made “encroachments” on the road to the school lands and planned to build ‘pillars’ to guard what they considered their rightful property. Another of the executors, Robert Bradshaw, arranged for a meeting of the school in Lisburn and prevented any further infringements.

⁶¹ Will of John Hancock Senior; Newhouse, *History of Friends School*. The teacher was “to be a sober, reputable person, and one of said people, and the school to be under the inspection of the quarterly meeting of said people for the province of Ulster.” This was to counteract a trend where Quakers had to put their children to the care of outsiders because schoolmasters were in very short supply.

⁶² His presence bolsters Newhouse’s notion of an ongoing connection between Lisburn Quakers and Bristol.

⁶³ Nevill H. Newhouse, “John Hancock, Junior: 1762-1823,” *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquities of Ireland* 101 (1971).

Bristol around the same time. Yet Hancock's initial support for his friend was suddenly withdrawn; he cited some concerns with Gough's behaviour but also feared that Thomas Greer would think he was meddling.⁶⁴ In 1792, Hancock was clearly still willing to make conciliatory gestures towards the conservative element of the Society, although apparently for the last time.

Hancock would later confirm that his dissatisfaction with the society was influenced by his exasperation with the constant internal quarrelling:

I am willing in this manner to state to the public, and especially to those who are acquainted with me, my reasons for the present apparent change in my conduct...I held the groundwork of them for years, while I continued in several instances an active member among the people called Quakers. I had for a long time back viewed the departure in Christian practice, which prevailed among this people to a very great degree, and often zealously testified against it privately and publicly, as they themselves well know.⁶⁵

He questioned "their willingness to engage in litigious contentions," criticizing those members who "being much engrossed in secular pursuits, have lulled their consciences to sleep by a blind reliance on conforms and outward performances" of peculiar speech and dress.⁶⁶ This embittered view of the Society doubtlessly reflected a scandal that erupted in the 1770s when his Uncle Nevill declared bankruptcy. The Nevills had also inherited from John Hancock Senior and were given permission to live in a Hancock residence and use the offices until John reached his majority. Nevill's deteriorating situation was apparent in a letter to Thomas Greer dated 5th Aug 1773, which requested permission to marry his sister-in-law.⁶⁷ Greer was no stranger to sticky familial and financial situations and was then currently in the process of arranging a marriage between Jacob Hancock and Mary Greer, the latter of whom was emphatically protesting that she "was by no means tired of [her] situation, nor any way disposed to alter [her]

⁶⁴ Newhouse. "A History of Friends School."

⁶⁵ John Hancock, *Reasons for Withdrawing from Society with the People Called Quakers* (New York: G. & R. Waite, 1801), 3.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ *Correspondence of the Greer family*, PRONI. John's aunt must have already passed on and Nevill was attempting a quick consolidation of family fortunes in order to save himself. See also Newhouse, "John Hancock, Junior: 1762-1823."

condition.”⁶⁸ Greer had only mixed success that summer, for within a matter of weeks the girl consented to marry Jacob but the matter with Nevill was beyond repair. The bankruptcy sent John’s mother into a panic because the creditors began to make claims against the Hancock estate, where Nevill had been working and residing. She sent out a stream of letters, including one that requested aid from John Gough, then still headmaster of the School on Prospect Hill, who referred the matter back to Greer. Greer was furious with her interference, preferring to handle the matter using his own methods and at his own pace:

Your late husband chose [the] executors of this will because...he thought them men of property and understanding... just because one of the executors has been disgraced is no reason to try to discredit the whole and so pave the way to have specially chosen Guardians appointed and throw off the executors. You threaten your husbands’ executors as if they were neither men of Property nor Integrity...we will not be led by people who have no business to meddle.⁶⁹

In March of 1776 John Hancock informed Greer that Nevill’s creditors were not yet satisfied and were “determined to start a law suit against the Executors of the late John Hancock respecting the Bleachyard, etc.” A few weeks later, he sent word that “[t]here is no sign of Brother Nevill’s affairs reaching an amicable agreement with the creditors... The creditors mean to go to law and not allow the Bond but place it in opposition to what Wm Nevill has expended on Lambeg Green.” A letter from Dublin had insisted Hancock come to the capital immediately in order to settle the matter. Hancock recounted that he “refused and said ‘they would not able to wrest any part of my property from my hands without bringing considerable damages upon their own heads.’”⁷⁰ Hancock’s first brush with conflict came out well for the lawsuit failed, and the boy was left to manage on his own, which would have immediately involved building his own trade

⁶⁸ Elizabeth Hancock to Thomas Greer, July 1773. *Correspondence of the Greer family*, D. 1044/370, PRONI, Belfast.

⁶⁹ John Hancock to Thomas Greer, Feb, 1776. *Correspondence of the Greer family*, D. 1044/453 PRONI, Belfast.

⁷⁰ Ibid. 23 March 1776. *Correspondence of the Greer family*, D. 1044/453 PRONI, Belfast.

networks as many of the creditors that dealt with Nevill now refused to deal with Lambeg Green. Hancock essentially passed this responsibility back to the executors by suggesting that he remain at school another year and agreeing to be apprenticed to his Uncle Jacob at the age of sixteen.⁷¹ At the completion of his apprenticeship, Hancock was engaged to Greer's daughter, Sally, and there is no reason to doubt this pairing was also arranged by the redoubtable patriarch of Dungannon.

There are very few sources on Hancock's personal circumstances at the time, but a fair amount about his lifestyle in this period can be deduced.⁷² This decade would have been dominated by familial concerns as he settled into the property at Lambeg and began a family (his wife gave birth to four sons between 1785 and 1794).⁷³ There is little doubt that the Executors continued to hold sway over a great deal of his life, and that dealing with his father-in-law would have been tiresome. In 1787 Hancock was reported to be in Hotwells, taking the waters, "as his father had done before him," leading Newhouse to suggest that John inherited his father's poor health.⁷⁴ In 1794 John's wife died. He never remarried and it is arguably this event that offered John the latitude to finally oppose the conservative element of the Society.

⁷¹ Ibid. 30 March 1776. *Correspondence of the Greer family*, D. 1044/453 PRONI, Belfast.

⁷² For an approximation of the appearance of the Valley during this decade and details of the linen bleaching process that Hancock was involved in, see Ulster Folk and Transport Museum, "Illustrations of the Irish Linen Industry in 1783 by William Hincks," *Ulster Folklife* 23 (1977).

⁷³ Ewen and Muriel Cameron, June 2004.

⁷⁴ Mollie Grubb, "Abraham Shackleton and the Irish Separation of 1797-1803," *Journal of the Friends Historical Society* 56, no. 4 (1993), 270. The Society expressed written concern at the tendency of Thomas Greer and his heirs to ignore the decisions of the meeting around this time. Also, in 1783 Hancock reappeared in Greer's letters, apologizing for unintentionally contradicting Greer in the process of responding to a newspaper editorial Greer had submitted anonymously: "If I have known you were the writer I would have engaged in the controversy with different sentiments and less appearance of party-spirit." John Hancock to Thomas Greer, 1 Feb 1783. *Correspondence of the Greer family*, D. 1044/453 PRONI, Belfast; Hancock's health issues are mentioned in letter in the same fond, dated 1 June 1779.

For a time Hancock continued to be a leading member of the Society, which as Mollie Grubb has discussed, occurred during “one of the great watersheds not only of religious but of political and social history.”⁷⁵ Irish Friends had attempted to remain self-contained but could not remain immune to the political and religious ideals being spread throughout the larger society. As the rebellion years progressed, evidence mounted that Quakers were being victimized, sparking the controversy within the Society over the right to possess arms for self-defence.⁷⁶ During this time Hancock came to know and admire Abraham Shackleton, proprietor of a high-profile boarding school in Kildare. Shackleton’s best-known alumnus is Edmund Burke (1729-1797), who became a lifelong friend of the Shackleton family.⁷⁷ Shackleton was a religiously motivated progressive. In his view, the Bible could be subjected to literary criticism, leading to his total rejection of large parts of scripture. He was interested in philosophy and what he referred to as “metaphysical speculation.”⁷⁸ In an appreciation of Shackleton published after the schoolmaster’s death, Hancock affirmed that “His opinions were his own and not borrowed.”⁷⁹ In particular, Shackleton and his circle wished to see the Society become less severe in their customs, encouraged the relaxation of the complex marriage formalities, and sharply criticized those Friends who had become worldly in their outlook through acquiring excessive

⁷⁵ Ibid, 261-291.

⁷⁶ Much of this debate was theoretical, for few members owned weapons and most of those who did eventually destroyed them or faced disownment by the Society. Some of these individuals seem to have been unable to align their religious and political inclinations and joined the United Irish cause. *The Black Book of the Rebellion* contains a list of United Irishmen provided by an informant and declares one “Nicholson, a Quaker” to be a known rebel, along with other likely Quaker names. Such individuals were influenced by prevalent democratic rhetoric but it is likely a desire to protect commercial and scientific pursuits enhanced their political motivations. See *McCance Papers*, D.272/1, PRONI, Belfast.

⁷⁷ For a summary of Burke’s thoughts on the Revolution, see James Conniff, “Edmund Burke’s Reflections on the Coming Revolution in Ireland,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 47, no. 1 (1986). 37-59.

⁷⁸ Ibid, 263.

⁷⁹ John Hancock, “A Sketch of the Character of Abraham Shackleton of Ballitore,” (Dublin Historical Collection. PB 20:2)

wealth or taking their religious brethren to court. Together, Shackleton and Hancock spearheaded a reform movement within the Society (approximately 1791-1803).⁸⁰

To address the inflammatory internal debates, the Friends undertook an inquiry into the state of their members' spirituality in 1798. As was appropriate for the political atmosphere that year, issues revolving around self-defence and Biblical interpretation dominated, yet it was a relatively minor matter that set off an actual separation. The incident involved the desire of a friend of Hancock's, John Rogers, to marry without undergoing the agreed upon "rounds," a formality of social engagements and monetary negotiations. Instead, he held his wedding in a room at the Lisburn schoolhouse founded by the Hancocks, provoking the Society to disown everyone in attendance. John Hancock took the opportunity to publish a series of pamphlets that criticized the state of the society and presented his own spiritual worldview. He questioned how "a society who have pleaded for the liberty of conscience, against the united efforts of surrounding nations, can now so far deviate from their first principle" and warned that "...some have been asleep in the day of ease, and drawing much of their consolations from the things of the world."⁸¹ He reminisced about his friend, the American Quickest minister Job Scott, who frequently declared that "without innovation there never would be renovation" and suggested that their values were dangerously compromised:

They go to meetings regularity at home, and frequently venture to leave their worldly concerns to attend their general meetings abroad. They engage in what is called church discipline; and these acts being accomplished, they are ready to think they have fulfilled the whole duty as a Christian. I doubt not but many of them have much sincerity, and in

⁸⁰ See Grubb, "Abraham Shackleton and the Irish Separation of 1797-1803," 268. The Separatists asserted the supremacy of the inward Light in the heart and acknowledged the Bible as a secondary rule: "Separatists were...voices in the wilderness, but they anticipated the great swell of nineteenth-century biblical criticism...it is arguable that the Society chose the wrong way forward, losing itself in the narrow toils of evangelicalism when a wider destiny beckoned to it" (ibid).

⁸¹ John Hancock, *A Friendly Expostulation, Addressed to the People Called Quakers* (Belfast: 1802).

proportion as that prevails in their minds, they will find acceptance in the divine light.⁸²

Hancock felt that “lukewarmness and a worldly spirit were greater enemies to the cause of righteousness” than undergoing reform, and enjoined the “youthful minds not yet hackneyed in the ways of men” to seek out the “many ways of active usefulness to ourselves and others, without having our minds almost totally absorbed in considerations of how to make money.”⁸³

The split within the Society was small and had little effect outside their endogamous circle. However, that it occurred at all supports an argument that the surge of dissension and reform was affecting all levels of Irish society.⁸⁴ Quaker reformers were progressive, liberal, sympathetic to Catholic emancipation and sought to ease the stranglehold of the elders on their lives.⁸⁵ The conservative element in the Society felt that the reformers were disrespectful of custom and careening towards deism, they attached what they considered a derogatory term to the separatists, “New Lights.” In many ways, this internal conflict did indeed amount to an attempt to encourage the incorporation of New Light ideas into the

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid. Hancock’s thoughts were echoed by his friend John Rogers, who, in the note in the margins of what appears to be his copy of Hancock’s publication, complained that “the building erected among the people called Q is polluted, it is corrupted, it is supported by many with defiled and unwashed hands...” Hancock, *A Friendly Expostulation, Addressed to the People Called Quakers*. Copy at Linen Hill Library, Belfast.

⁸⁴ Speculation continues over the extent that outside influences fuelled the Separation movement. Rufus Jones suggests the visit of American Quietist minister Job Scott accelerated the reform movement within the Society, see Rufus Matthew Jones, *The Later Periods of Quakerism* (London: Macmillan and Co., Limited, 1921). Grubb mentions Scott as being intimate with Shackleton’s circle of friends through a connection with Hancock, as Scott’s journal contains a reference to “returning to the house of my friend John Hancock.” She also believes Samuel Fisher (a contemporary of Robert Barclay) and the writings of radical deist Thomas Paine were influential, see Grubb, “Abraham Shackleton and the Irish Separation of 1797-1803,” 264-6.

⁸⁵ Grubb, “Abraham Shackleton and the Irish Separation of 1797-1803,” 265.

Society of Friends.⁸⁶ New Lights were radical Presbyterians and the New Light message was pitched primarily at polite society – in Ulster, William Drennan and his father were notable leaders and readily credited the influence of Francis Hutcheson's ideas on their own views on politics, morality and religion, where they endorsed "[b]enevolence, freedom of enquiry and the pursuit of virtue."⁸⁷

The disaffection of similar liberal progressives from the Irish Society of Friends remains problematic. It could indicate an unwillingness of the Society to bend with the times⁸⁸ but it is also clear that neither Hancock nor Rogers had an experience that can be considered representative of the members of the Society as a whole. Their unflattering remarks hardly negate the many accounts of the Society's superior record of conscientious objection and commitment to administering to the poor during the many conflicts and famines that beset Ireland, and the only biographer of John Hancock has sought to stress the continuity of his actions before and after the break. The break within the Friends does, however, underscore that the Society was affected by the process of colonization and by the political agendas of the day. It was capable of producing individuals, like Hancock, that possessed means, education and were steeped in the ideals of the Society, yet chose to take this viewpoint into the outside world to affect change.⁸⁹ Hancock's involvement with Quaker disputes also expose him as

⁸⁶ The Society of Friends maintained ideals that were, with the exception of pacifism, compatible with the perspective of the rebels, and the occasional individual Quaker is known to have crossed over from the sympathetic sidelines to direct participation in seditious activities. This is consistent with the record of Quaker activists in America. However, Hancock's endorsement of Union, his abhorrence of war, and his scathing criticism of those Quakers who refused to destroy their arms, indicates that he was not one of them, and it was his troubled personal history with the Society that disillusioned him on both a personal and political level, making his trademark contrariness more understandable.

⁸⁷ Caroline Robbins, "'When It Is That Colonies May Turn Independent': An Analysis of the Environment and Politics of Francis Hutcheson (1694-1746)," *William and Mary College Quarterly* 11, no. 2, Scotland and America (1954), 214-251.

⁸⁸ This is the major theme of Grubb's piece.

⁸⁹ Brooke Hindle suggests it was exactly this group of marginal Quakers who made the greatest impact on politics and science, see Brooke Hindle, "The Quaker Background and Science in Colonial Philadelphia," *Isis* 46, no. 3 (1955), 244.

being just as much a rebel within his circle as Drennan and Templeton were in their own contexts.

In summary, the Proprietors of *The Belfast Monthly Magazine* represented a liberal faction in Ulster that “condemned the landlord system, called for a wider franchise, disapproved of religious bigotry, [and] even in some cases sought to break the connection with the British Empire.”⁹⁰ Almost all the content it contained was anonymously authored, though Templeton’s abilities as a naturalist and meteorologist earmark those sections as his domain, and Drennan’s style distinguishes his contributions to the Monthly Retrospect on Politics. John Hancock was involved in both the editing and writing process and his presence is felt in the commentaries and literary criticisms penned under his pseudonym “K,”⁹¹ and in his Commercial Reports that scrupulously tie what he perceived as being a dire local economic situation to the interruption of trade with French allies decreed by the Orders in Council. Hancock also became embroiled in several ongoing debates that pervaded the journal: the spread of paper currency, the petitions being circulated for the emancipation of the Catholics, and a growing concern with the state of education. A profile of some of the content of this magazine will confirm that it functioned as the mouthpiece of progressive, liberal thought in the greater Belfast area for a period of six years.⁹²

⁹⁰ Campbell, *The Dissenting Voice: Protestant Democracy in Ulster from Plantation to Partition*, 1.

⁹¹ For example, he scorches the writer in his first review and decides “it somewhat strange, that in a city dignified by the only university in the kingdom, no person could be found to direct the printer as to the proper form of arranging a quotation from Juvenal in the title page.” *B.M.M.* Vol. I (1808), 62.

⁹² Newhouse, “John Hancock, Junior: 1762-1823,” 48.

**“EDUCATION AND GOVERNMENT ALONE
FORM THE SOUL OF MAN:”**

CONTENT OF *THE BELFAST MONTHLY MAGAZINE*

The introduction to the first issue of *The Belfast Monthly Magazine* extolled the audience to understand the purpose of the publication, so as not to misinterpret its intent and “unfairly disregard” the efforts of the Proprietors:

We are, no doubt, a distant province, remote from that great laboratory of learning...yet if we are deprived of the peculiar advantages, we are also free from the peculiar inconveniences, from the prejudices, the parties, the jarring interests which distract and confuse that great metropolis. As spectators on an eminence, too distant to be biased by their hopes and fears, yet near enough to view and judge their operations, we view the different parties contending in the great field of science; we can calmly observe their movements, avoid their errors, and improve on their discoveries. Here we can behold the great machine in motion, observe its actions, remark its several wheels and springs, without being stunned by its noise, or endangered by its vicinity. We see the various systems of politics and literature revolving each in its separate course, without being drawn into the vortex; and behold the great luminaries of the present age enlightening their respective spheres without being overpowered by their attraction or dazzled by their splendour.¹

This colourful, Newtonian description neatly revealed that the Proprietors considered themselves part of the rational, enlightened and emphatically British elite, yet the tone also indicates that they realize they are so physically remote as to be (unfairly) treated as inferiors. They offered a palatable context for all the

¹ “Editorial,” *B.M.M.* Vol. I (1808), 2. For a general discussion of Newtonian political language, see Richard Striner, “Political Newtonianism: The Cosmic Model of Politics in Europe and America,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 52, no. 4 (1995), 583-608.

criticisms that would come to be offered during the run of the magazine: everything was, of course, intended in the spirit of fellow British citizens offering commentary and correction, and certainly was not seditious complaint from scrappy colonials.

The introduction also functioned as an articulation of the Anglo-Irish perspective, largely confirming Stephen Slemon's musings on the modern discourse of colonialism and post-colonialism, where he suggested the favoured dichotomy between "Europe" and its "Others" is inadequate.² Ulster settlers clearly express pride, confidence and pious frustration as they address their concerns with the colonial system. The Protestant Irish were an example of those settler cultures which Slemon refers to as being both "strident" and "complicit;"³ that is, they were capable of considering themselves to be both morally superior to and disadvantaged by the English, all the while carefully maintaining their distinctiveness from the natives.

2.1 Audience and Authorship of *The Belfast Monthly Magazine*

The comments of the editors, in conjunction with the variety and depth of articles offered, indicated that the magazine's upper middle-class audience had some knowledge of the classics, more than a passing interest in political events on the continent and a fashionable curiosity about science and inventions. Drennan's welcome in the October 1808 issue described his authors and readers as dwelling in:

An extensive tract of country wonderfully diversified in soil and produce, a central town in the midst of a numerous population, an industrious disposition, an inquisitive mind, a persevering temper, wealth sufficient to support speculation without inducing indolence, a strong natural taste for science, not a little for works of fancy, each capable of high improvement, all these mark a spot where literature must flourish if its seed be permitted to germinate.⁴

² Stephen Slemon, "Unsettling the Empire: Resistance Theory for the Second World," *World Literature Written in English* 30, no. 2 (1990), 30.

³ Ibid.

⁴ "To the Public." *B.M.M.* Vol. I (1808), 2-3.

The publication catered to a readership that wished to “reap the fruit of that experience, those labours, contests, and battles, which had been presented to his mind, without endangering his tranquillity or disturbing his repose.” *The London Monthly Magazine* was chosen “as a model to imitate and possibly surpass.”⁵

The Proprietors claimed that efforts would be made to reject any content that could give just grounds for offence to any of their readership, avoiding “theological controversies and intemperate political discussions” and prioritizing “Irish topics for Irishmen.” This was an ambitious program and not strictly adhered to throughout the six years of publication. In December of 1810 a preface to the sixth volume dryly noted that the Proprietors had been advised “to abandon graver subjects, and give receipts in quackery and cookery. Perhaps a report of the fashions would be acceptable to many of our readers.” They collectively retorted that it “is impossible to please all tastes” and defended their decision to speak openly, whether “our sentiments on political subjects are approved or not.”⁶

The authors and audience were also familiar with French ideas, even if many could not speak nor read the language. The detailed coverage of continental politics can be attributed to the ongoing war but this alone does not account for casual references to Voltaire, reviewing works published in French, and providing articles on the French Revolutionary calendar. Maire Kennedy has emphasized that the French language had begun to transcend the religious, political and linguistic divisions in Ireland, “becoming a language of culture and scholarship,”⁷ particularly in areas that had experienced an influx of Huguenots.⁸ The appeal of French learning to this faction would have been rooted in John Locke’s (1693) recommendation to teach French as early as possible and to teach arithmetic, geography, chronology, history and geometry in French or Latin, so that “he will

⁵ Ibid. For a discussion of *The Monthly Magazine* in London, see Geoffrey Carnall, “The Monthly Magazine,” *Review of English Studies* 5, no. 18 (1954).

⁶ *B.M.M.*, preface to the 6th volume, iii-iv.

⁷ Kennedy, 22.

⁸ Ibid. Kennedy’s study does not mention Lisburn, which is seven miles up the Lagan River from Belfast, but the town had embraced the Huguenot Louis Crommelin and his colony of linen weavers a century before.

get a knowledge of the Sciences, and the Language to boot.”⁹ Indeed, that was precisely the education that had been sought for Drennan’s own child¹⁰ and was to become more widely available with the establishment the Belfast Academical Institution.

I have been cautious to avoid overestimating the presence of William Drennan as editor, or writer. Drennan provided his name and interest in starting up the publication, but was not necessarily as involved in the production as might be expected. A disclaimer given to readers in May of 1809 makes clear the distinction between the opinions of the Editor, who ostensibly was Drennan, the various authors of the published contents, and the Proprietors, where the emphasis is given to the latter, who determined as a group what is published by correspondents. It is likely that the editing duties increasingly fell to Hancock when Drennan was preoccupied with other projects, or on one of the many visits he and his wife made to Cheshire to visit with her family. Nevill Newhouse confirms that Hancock’s pseudonym in the magazine was “K” and mentions, but does not endorse, the comments of English Quaker journalist James Jenkins (1753-1831) who suggested that Hancock for a time was the general editor. Newhouse claims that Jenkins was too malicious to be reliable but this may be overly cautious; a short example will elucidate.¹¹ In the first three issues of the magazine, a debate was sparked on the merits and demerits of paper currency. In November 1808, a letter to the editor complained that the “Commercial Reporter has become a panegyrist of paper currency,” prompting a reply from the reporter in question, signed “K.”¹² In other instances information mentioned in the content of the issue which must have involved Hancock, was discussed in the Commercial

⁹ John Locke, John W. Yolton, and Jean S. Yolton, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education, The Clarendon Edition of the Works of John Locke* (Oxford Clarendon Press, 1989). 175-6; 198. Quoted in Kennedy, 25.

¹⁰ Drennan et al., *The Drennan-McTier Letters*. Vol. 1, 585. William wrote, “The first master I should wish for Tom would be a French master and an intimacy in any house or school where it is the only language spoken.”

¹¹ Newhouse, “John Hancock, Junior: 1762-1823,” 47.

¹² “Letter to the Editor.” *B.M.M.* Vol. I (1808), 195.

Reports from a first-hand perspective.¹³ By the final issue, Hancock's influence is present throughout and the Political Retrospect, traditionally Drennan's forum, is twenty-four pages strong and divided into two parts where the first section seems to be Drennan and the second is signed "K."

Considering the content of the publication was generally provided anonymously, a few comments about authorship are necessary. Many of the articles must have been obtained from freelancers, and reprints of fiction and government documents were common. The anonymity of the editorials and preference to use pseudonyms does not prevent research of the Proprietors as a whole, particularly as their early intentions to remain objective and steer away from inflammatory religious and political topics was not wholly successful. That is to say, the excesses of Orangeism, Defenderism and other sectarian political movements are excluded, but the Proprietors made only minimal efforts to curb their own biases. Instead, the magazine forms a largely cohesive statement of east-Antrim liberalism in the immediate post-Union fallout. Therefore, comments in the Reports always reflect the principles and aims of the Proprietors, even where the authorship is ambiguous. For example, the writer of the December 1808 Commercial Report does not appear to have been Hancock, as he refers to himself as having "had in 1806 the authority of a gentleman at the bar," but the article nonetheless contains a familiar combination of pious morality and scepticism. The essayist asserted that the combination of young men and women in the cotton-factories promoted promiscuous behaviour and that "[i]n the system of trade, man is too frequently considered as a machine, by whose labour money is to be put into the pockets of his employer, while his morals and health are totally disregarded."¹⁴ The same report recounts a trip through Lancashire and Yorkshire that demonstrated in harsh relief how morals were greatly deteriorating in populous manufacturing districts, and the "vices of idleness, which in some parts

¹³ See for example, "The Meeting of the Linen-Drapers at Armagh," *ibid.*, 401-404. The same event is discussed from the first person, *ibid.*, 396-7.

¹⁴ "Commercial Report," *B.M.M.*, Vol. I (1808), 319. It is located in the Dec. 1 edition: note that the publication schedule changed from the first to the last day of the month, and therefore there are two December 1808 editions.

of Ireland arise from want of employment, may without great care be converted into the evils of trade.”¹⁵ The report concludes by recommending regulation. In June of 1809, Hancock similarly remembers a trip through the Potteries of Staffordshire when he “beheld such vast capital invested in one single article of manufacture, this earthen ware, which in comparison of some otherwise, would rather appear of minor importance.”¹⁶ However, because of high wages, the workers “squandered their earnings” and he “was surprised to find such crowds of people in a state of idleness, men, women and boys; many of whom, even boys not exceeding 15 or 16, in a state of gross intoxication.”¹⁷ Just as these two reports have different authors but similar perspectives and recommendations, there are no problematic inconsistencies in any of the political and commercial reports. It is safe to assume that the content of the editorials and monthly reports was endorsed by the Proprietors.

2.2 *The Belfast Monthly Magazine* and Education in Ulster

The collective writings of the Proprietors of *The Belfast Monthly Magazine* consistently argue for modernizing education. They declared that Ireland as a whole needed to improve the quantity and quality of its educational offerings and that there should be non-denominational choices available which would provide a good grounding in modern languages (i.e. French), science and useful skills. None of these suggestions were groundbreaking, but to date they had not been implemented because of governmental turn-over and inefficiencies. In the meantime, most Irish schools serving the middle-class continued to focus on providing classical subjects with an Anglican bias in order to prepare students for a university education in England.

The Belfast Monthly Magazine’s argument for local, integrated and non-denominational schooling was fuelled by the Proprietors’ support for Catholic

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ “Potteries of Staffordshire,” *B.M.M.* III (1809), 418.

¹⁷ Ibid.

emancipation; their cry for better science education was derived from their own experiences. Drennan had received medical training at the University of Edinburgh, Hancock spent his formative years at a boarding school in England, and Templeton was entirely educated by private tutors. All three had found their scientific knowledge useful in Ireland. The Proprietors cumulatively represent three strong educational traditions present in Ulster at the time. Drennan's family was thoroughly embedded into the Scottish university connection as embodied in the figures of educators Francis Hutcheson and Alexander Holiday. Templeton was part of the prestigious tradition of natural historians practicing in Ireland. Hancock's family was involved in establishing one of the specialized, sectarian primary schools then proliferating in the countryside.

The first issue of the magazine also set out education as a major concern of the Proprietors, indicating that it would be a recurring topic in subsequent issues:

Disorders in the south have been reprobated and punished. Agriculture is gaining ground. Statutes for anticipating crimes have been passed. General education however, goes on languidly, or not at all...¹⁸

It proved to be a favourite subject of the readers of the magazine, as well. An early respondent assumed the pseudonym "Poplicola" and wrote "To the Inhabitants of Ireland on the Education of his Countrymen," claiming that he viewed "the culture of a more improved education necessary to refine [Ireland's] children, and render them capable of enjoying the advantages of her situation, her climate, and her soil."¹⁹ A subsequent letter to the editor noted that "[t]he education of youth is a subject in which, although much has been said, and perhaps much done in some places of this kingdom, yet it must be confessed much remains both to be said and done, even in this enlightened province."²⁰ These early statements of purpose gave rise to a number of articles, biographies of

¹⁸ "Provincial Occurrences," *B.M.M.* Vol. I (1808), 72-73.

¹⁹ "Poplicola to the Inhabitants of Ireland, on the Education of his Countrymen," *B.M.M.* Vol. I (1808), 269.

²⁰ "On Education," *B.M.M.* Vol. II (1809), 89.

great men and local teachers that were suitable for emulation, comparative descriptions of schools in Ireland and England and reprints of reports from the Board of Education. In May 1809 a reader commended their efforts:

I have observed, with pleasure, the particular attention you pay to every thing relative to Education....generalizing Education, by bringing it home to the door of every person in the kingdom, at a small expense, either to the government or the people, would be of the most essential service, and in all probability tend as much to conciliate the minds of the lower classes to the government, as any other measure recommended for that purpose.²¹

Any discussion of Irish education, politics and science in this era generally deferred to the Edgeworth name, and this publication was no exception. Richard Lovell Edgeworth was a large landowner, inventor, and great promoter of education. He lived at Edgeworthstown and was married four times, producing a total of twenty-two children, the eldest of whom was the famous writer Maria Edgeworth. The pages of *The Belfast Monthly Magazine* were peppered with mentions of both father and daughter, although the interest of the magazine in the subject of education meant they necessarily gave preference to the father. Edgeworth's name first arose in the process of ascertaining the number of potential middle-class readers for the publication, for although Ireland...

does not bear nearly the same proportion to the population [as England]... the populous province of Ulster is, at least, not the most defective in cherishing a taste for the useful and substantial parts of literature. On them *The Belfast Monthly Magazine* must chiefly rely for support, and much of its contents should be adapted to the information and improvement of the middle classes of society.²²

The first article of the inaugural issue was an anonymous response to Maria Edgeworth's "Essay on Irish Bulls," which supported her view that Irishmen have an unreasonably poor reputation, asserting that the "true-born Englishman seems to be apt to ridicule others in order to indirectly convey superiority." The author found the whole notion of national tendencies rather suspect, considering it an

²¹ "On National Schools," *B.M.M.* Vol. II (1809).

²² "Letter to the Editor," *B.M.M.* Vol. I (1808), 83.

exercise in metaphysics, which in turn was “a rather laborious method of demonstrating one’s ignorance, rather than a science of real utility.” The essayist did, however, question when and why the Irish gained a reputation for being turbulent and passionate, suggesting that it was absent in the Elizabethan period. From this, the author sided with nurture over nature:

I am inclined to differ from the usual opinions on the subject: education can bend the human mind into any form. Climate may give a trivial cast to the character; the poverty of a country may make its inhabitants inhospitable; profusion in the soil may encourage generosity; but Education and Government alone form the soul of man.²³

This excerpt served as a concise guide to the outlook of the Proprietors and the yardstick by which they selected material for the magazine. If Education and Government form the soul of man, then there could be no better topic for discussion and nearly all the content of *The Belfast Monthly Magazine* related to at least one of the two themes.

Richard Lovell Edgeworth has been credited with reopening the education question after the Union. Edgeworth’s volumes on *Practical Education* attracted attention when they first appeared in 1798; through his personal efforts, a select committee was appointed in 1799, which resolved to recognize and remedy the defective state of education for the lower classes. Schools were to be maintained and inspected in each parish; the masters were to undergo examination, receive certificates on morals and abilities, and be licensed annually. Masters would be paid a fixed amount and provided with a bonus based on success and books were to be chosen by an appointed committee. Edgeworth’s vision amounted to “lower class education apart from schools of the middle sort and apart from any ladder of university entrance.”²⁴ The 1798 commission was revived after the Union and its commissioners produced fourteen reports in the period from October 1806 to October 1812. *The Belfast Monthly Magazine* reprinted them, accompanied by a

²³ “Essay on Irish Bulls,” *B.M.M.* Vol. I (1808), 6-9.

²⁴ Akenson, *The Irish Education Experiment; the National System of Education in the Nineteenth Century*, 74-5.

letter from Edgeworth to his fellow commissioners.²⁵ The first thirteen reports reviewed the purposes and effectiveness of the parish, diocesan and grammar schools already in existence. The reports concluded that schooling for the poor was insufficient and promoted the establishment of a permanent body of education commissioners. These suggestions amounted to a recommendation for massive state intervention in education and for the provision of a system of education for the poorer classes. Duties would involve ongoing inquiries, administration of parliamentary grants, controlling the distribution of schools and school materials, as well as a series of training institutions created for the proper training of teachers. Finally, they articulated a principle that was to be pivotal in all later discussions of Irish education:

We conceive this to be of essential importance in any new establishment for the education of the lower classes in Ireland, and we venture to express our unanimous opinion, that no such plan however wisely and unexceptionably contrived in other respects be carried into effectual execution in this country, unless it be explicitly avowed and clearly understood as its leading principle that no attempt shall be made to influence or disturb the peculiar religious tenets of any sect or description of Christians.²⁶

This was necessary because of the inadequacies and excesses in the current system, which had been thoroughly discussed in previous reports. A brief summary follows.

The parish, diocesan and royal schools were created by legislation and endowed through government grants. Parish schools were established during the reign of Henry VIII and renewed in the late eighteenth century as proselytizing agencies for spreading Protestantism. Diocesan schools had been established under Elizabeth I to cement the allegiance of the Anglo-Irish middle classes: the Irish parliament was uncomfortable with the schools' political purposes but the institutions were tolerated because they offered higher subjects as well as

²⁵ *B.M.M.* Vol. IV (1810), 13.

²⁶ Reprinted in *B.M.M.* Vol. X (1813), 131. Also see *B.M.M.* Vol. X (1813), 181-187. The latter is an appendix to the Report, which is comprised of a letter from Edgeworth, followed by observations from the editors.

elementary literacy. As part of the scheme of settling Ulster under James VI and I, a system of grammar schools was devised for the plantation counties. Despite good intentions, the Ulster colonists made little effort to provide the schools, and as late as 1621 only four schools were established in counties Tyrone, Derry, Fermanagh, and Cavan combined. However, these royal schools appear to have been reasonably well maintained throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and a total of 211 such schools were still functioning in 1791.²⁷

Less successful were the Charter schools, where the government granted a charter to an incorporated Society to run the schools and provided aid through parliamentary grants. In January 1810 the Proprietors reprinted a letter from Edgeworth to his fellow Commissioners of the Board of Education in Ireland on the subject of charter schools in order “to contribute our part to bringing the subject of education more fully before the public.”²⁸ The report summarized how the Charter schools were endowed to provide children of the destitute poor with industrial and literary training, along with a heavy dose of Protestant morality and religion. Classes were mixed but religious instruction was Protestant and Bible reading and catechizing monopolized the schedule. As time progressed, Parliament began granting duty revenues and eventually allotted a grant to the society in a steadily increasing amount. In return, the society provided “the spectacle of a curious and thoroughly inefficient administrative structure”²⁹ both oversized and overly devolved. Donald Akenson summarizes the Charter schools as amounting to a “Taj Majal built on quicksand, [where] the elaborate central administration was swallowed up by local incompetence and abuse.”³⁰ The society’s educational gifts to Ireland were dubious. In order to efficiently proselytize the popish Irish, the society created a number of boarding schools, thus allowing it to remove children entirely from parental influence and

²⁷ Donald H. Akenson, *God's Peoples: Covenant and Land in South Africa, Israel, and Ulster* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), 22-29.

²⁸ “Edgeworth on Charter Schools,” *B.M.M.* Vol IV (1810), 13.

²⁹ Akenson, *The Irish Education Experiment; the National System of Education in the Nineteenth Century*, 33.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

permitting the movement of children between the school with “warranting” circumstances. Justification for such transplantation could include promotion from nursery to regular school, adjustments for the purpose of balancing numbers, or:

The avowed object of the society being to educate the children entrusted to its care in the established religions, whenever this object is likely to be interrupted by the interference of the parent, the child is removed from the neighbourhood of the parent’s residence to a more distant school.³¹

For all these reasons, the commissioners of the Board of Education denounced the Charter Schools in their 1809 report.³²

The reports often indicated that problems in the county’s schools affected the reputation of the government. The fifth report, excerpted in August 1810, claimed that Ireland was “one of the few countries in the world where absolute want, except in large cities, is unknown and as among the lower Irish filial piety is peculiarly prevalent, retirement to a hospital in old age is unpopular; but care should be taken to prevent this prejudice from extending to the idea of educating children in hospitals.” Instead “every means should be taken to render it creditable to have been educated in our public charitable seminaries, which, from the reports before this board, appear to be in a flourishing condition and promise to be of extensive and permanent advantage to this country.”³³ The sixth report endorsed the Blue Coat School in Dublin, carefully documenting the heavy inputs of money it received from the Erasmus Smith organization.³⁴ The Seventh report addressed the program at the Hibernian school for orphans of military personnel, which:

³¹ “Third Report from the Commissioners,” quoted in Akenson, *The Irish Education Experiment; the National System of Education in the Nineteenth Century*, 33-35.

³² Ibid.

³³ Reprinted in *B.M.M.* Vol. V (1810), 170-173.

³⁴ Erasmus Smith was a London alderman who obtained property in Ireland under the Act of Settlement and endowed schools with part of the acquired estates (est.1669).

In consequence of the existing and probably future state of Europe, a respectable standing army has become necessary to these islands, and it appears desirable that every reasonable inducement should be held out to the boys of this and similar institutions to volunteer into the troops of the time, this is a favourable idea with the present government, whose arrangement are obviously calculated to impress martial ideas, and inspire and early taste for a military life...The expediency however of this change in the system of the establishment has been questioned by many, and it must be acknowledge, that the parents of these children, where such exist, almost universally prefer their being apprentices to some trade...³⁵

The Eighth Report addressed the recent reform of the foundling hospital in Dublin;³⁶ the Ninth inquired into the state and condition of the schools founded by Erasmus Smith Esq. None of these articles inspired confidence in the system. More enthusiasm was expressed by the Proprietors and their readers for the spread of the Lancasterian system,³⁷ which correspondent J.A.B. decided could convert ‘the present love of the marvellous and extravagant...into a love of order and practical utility and the standard of merit would then be, not in the greatest deviation for all rule, but in the closest adherence to regularity and consistency.’³⁸

In February of 1811, a response to the reports appeared which was signed with the familiar “K.” In it, Hancock complained that “too often the public spirit elicited by parliamentary and other inquiries evaporates, and no good effects are ultimately or permanently produced. As yet we perceive no measure taken to remedy the abuses, so justly exposed.” He was disheartened by a note in the Eighth report on the Foundling Hospital, which found that “except when offices of emolument were to be disposed of, it was difficult out of a board consisting of nearly two hundred members to procure the attendance of five once a quarter, to

³⁵ “Seventh Report from the Board of Education,” Reprinted in *B.M.M.* Vol. V (1810), 269.

³⁶ “Eighth Report from the Board of Education,” Reprinted in *B.M.M.* Vol. (1810), 337.

³⁷ The Lancasterian system focused on instructing large student populations with minimal resources for example through the use of chalkboards and prefects. Explanations and discussions of the Lancasterian system appeared often, see “On Mr. Lancaster’s Method of Teaching,” *B.M.M.* Vol. V (1810), 170-171; “On the Lancasterian system of Education,” *B.M.M.* Vol. VIII (1812), 25-26.

³⁸ “On the Reports of the Board of Education,” *B.M.M.* Vol. VI (1811), 91-92.

transact the ordinary business of the society.” He was particularly affronted by a comment in the Seventh Report that the Hibernian school in the Phoenix Park was becoming a nursery for army recruits:

More might have been said to point out the hurtful tendencies of such a scheme, but alas! in this age of war and increasing military system, the voice of peace and her wise counsels are little attended to.³⁹

This latter issue was an old irritant for Hancock, who, in December of 1808, had complained that the ongoing war with France (sixteen years at the time of his writing) had affected the very structure of their society, supposedly affording parents with “an easy mode of relieving themselves of parental cares.” This was due to his somewhat misanthropic conception of the British as a calculating people who “were growing rich in commerce” and “forming plans for getting their sons provided for in different lines of military services.”⁴⁰ In the reply, he despaired that:

Our habits of thinking and of acting have become military. The plans of many for themselves and their children, have been so formed on a war-system, that much temporary, and in many instances permanent inconvenience would arise from a return to a peace establishment.⁴¹

Hancock commented that “the exclusive spirit arising from the connexion of church and state” was problematic as “no system of education can be extensively useful, which is confined by any connexion with religious opinion.”⁴² He also worried that “the Catholics will take alarm at any attempt to combine instruction in school learning, and doctrinal points of religion,”⁴³ a view supported another major enterprise of the magazine, which was Catholic emancipation. Such concerns were clearly derived from Hancock’s Quaker heritage and were far from Edgeworth’s priority, whose supposed gesture of sensitivity in religious instruction was merely to recommend that:

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ “On War,” *B.M.M.* Vol. I (1808), 328.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

The absurdities of Popery are so glaring “that to be hated, they need but to be seen.” But for the peace and prosperity of this country, the misguided Papists should not be rendered odious, he should rather be pointed to as an object of compassion; his ignorance should not be imputed to him as a crime; not should it be presupposed that those whose tenets are erroneous, cannot have their lives in the right. “Thank God! That I am a Protestant,” should be a mental thanksgiving, not a public taunt.⁴⁴

Hancock, by contrast, insisted upon “instructing the youth in useful branches of learning adapted to his situation in life, and leave the subject of religion to be settled between him and his parents, or rather trust the discovery of truth to the energies of his own mind in future life, while those energies have been sharpened by a good previous education.”⁴⁵ He correctly ascertained that “the temper of the times as manifested in the present system of legislation” precluded the establishment of a national system of education based on liberal principles.⁴⁶ Instead Hancock, and other dissenters, would continue to found and encourage alternative schooling that fit more comfortably with their ideals.

2.3 Expressing Support for the Belfast Academical Institution

The Belfast Academical Institution was conceived as a school with a Collegiate Department whose philosophy and syllabus would approach those of the Dissenting Academies across the Irish Sea.⁴⁷ It was an ambitious scheme that aimed to combine the functions of a school with those of a college for further education and also to provide public lectures on scientific subjects. An annual government grant of 1500 pounds was provided and proposals were made to furnish the school with a library, a museum for fossils and other specimens, and facilities for Professors of Divinity responsible to their respective denominations,

⁴⁴ “Letter from Edgeworth to the Board of Education on the subject of Charter Schools,” Reprinted in *B.M.M.* Vol. V (1810), 13.

⁴⁵ *B.M.M.* Vol. VI (1811), 91.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ Helena Chesney, “Enlightenment and Education,” Foster and Chesney, eds., *Nature in Ireland: A Scientific and Cultural History*, 377.

so that the Institution could become a seminary for the training of ministers. The intention was to make a good education more accessible to pupils from the growing middle classes. The Collegiate Department of the Institution planned to establish seven chairs, including a Chair of Natural Philosophy.

The main impetus for the project was supported by the reformist element and the design of the Institution was suitably democratic. The sovereign body was an annual general meeting of subscribers who functioned as the shareholders in a commercial enterprise with the right to elect both boards of managers and visitors. A complicated system ensured the rotation of Board members, although this was not as thorough a departure as was initially sought. In April of 1810, before the Institute had even opened its doors to the first pupils, Hancock noted that:

When the new Academical institution in Belfast was first proposed, in the fervour of zeal to promote its interests, complimentary letters were written to the neighbouring gentry. The plan so far succeeded, the fashion of subscribing spread and dignitaries of the church, the nobles, and high gentry of the land were enrolled among the subscribers. Now mark the progress of error. It has since been made a standing order of the Institution to saddle themselves with masters, three bishops and five members of parliament, whose qualification in literary pursuits do not enter into their view of the electors who return them, are constituted perpetual honorary visitors and consequently beset with a controul [sic] over an institution.⁴⁸

This was unacceptable since “the prime object...ought to be to promote the cause of literature and science, independently of religious sect or political party, and unshackled by the trammels imposed by worldly policy.” The institution was to lay the foundation for a disposition in the youth in future life to serve their country, and extend the cause of liberty.”⁴⁹ Among the leading lay supporters were Dr. Robert Tennant, brother of William Tennant (a United Irishman who was a state prisoner) and of John Tennant, who fled to France in 1798 and joined Napoleon's army, as well as Drennan, Hancock and Templeton. The immediate precedent for its establishment was the success of the Royal Cork Institute, which

⁴⁸ See “Belfast Academical Institution,” *B.M.M.* Vol. VI (1811), 164-6. Further reports were also promised.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

was a similar institution already in receipt of government funds. An initial application for government support of the school in Belfast was declined on the grounds that its constitution differed from those of the Cork and Dublin Institutes; an account of the constitution of the Cork Institute in November 1808 demonstrated that the difference was not in the structure of the boards of managers and visitors but in that in Cork the visitors were appointed by the King and were all members of the established church, and the managers had the right to nominate their own successors. *The Belfast Monthly Magazine* commented that “the want of a principle of renovation within itself, without having recourse to a body so unconnected with it and with one another, so little interested in its aims, and so difficult to be brought into action as the visitors, cannot escape animadversion.”⁵⁰ The project was ridiculed, relating the concern with constitutional niceties to the great interest in constitutions that had been excited in Belfast by the French Revolution and arguing that its aims were met by the Academy, already supplemented with private seminaries and the Literary Society, the latter of which was seeking government aid to provide popular lectures. It was considered doubtful that the Institution would evolve into a college – an idea that “would not bear the inspection of professional and literary men” and “application for signatures was made only to gentlemen in business of unsuspecting liberality.”⁵¹ Ultimately “such a scheme would be favoured neither by the opinion entertained by government of the religion, learning, and politics of the town, nor even by its local situation...”⁵²

Chesney has placed the foundation of the Belfast Academy (1786) and the Belfast Academical Institution (1807) as being a “great impetus to science” in the north.⁵³ The Academy was closely modelled on Scottish educational ideals: James Crombie, the first headmaster, was a St. Andrews graduate and a New

⁵⁰ Peter Brooke, *Controversies in Ulster Presbyterianism, 1790-1836* (University of Cambridge, Ph.D. Thesis, 1981).

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Helena Chesney, “Enlightenment and Education,” Foster and Chesney, eds., *Nature in Ireland: A Scientific and Cultural History*, 376.

Light. From 1791 onwards many of the Academy patrons and their associates became closely involved in the United Irishmen, “whose *cri de couer* was ‘equality for all men regardless of creed’” in a new attempt to harness and then utilize more fully Ireland’s human and natural resources. The Collegiate Department of the Institution planned to establish seven chairs, including a Chair of Natural Philosophy and a specialist in Hebrew.⁵⁴ Thomas Dix Hincks, who had previously been attached to the Cork Institution, filled the latter position. An article in *The Belfast Monthly Magazine* noted that:

Whatever be the celebrity which this infant seminary may attain; whatever advantage result from it to the country, must be attributed to the zeal and perseverance of one man. The Rev. Thomas Dix Hincks, minister of the dissenting congregation in Cork, and principal of a private seminary of Education, had for several years entertained a wish to found an Institution in that town similar in its form and object to the Dublin Society, but which the agriculture and manufacture of the kingdom have so highly benefited.⁵⁵

The Belfast Monthly Magazine continued to provide updates on the negotiations related to start-up, fulfilling the Proprietors wish to “make our readers more fully acquainted with the present state of the Academical Institution in this town,” as they were men “sensible of the importance of education to all ranks, and ardently desirous that effectual measures might be taken to promote its benefits” and they offered “heartly good will to the proposed institution.”⁵⁶

Drennan, Templeton and Hancock no doubt were very sincere in the space and attention they gave to the educational project of the day, although it did not escape their attention that education had become the focus of reforming energy by default, once the liberal split in the various congregations had been undertaken and the pleas for increased national independence and democracy had effectively been stifled. Some allowance must be also made for the fact that the Proprietors had become the propertied, older generation they had rebelled against in their youth, and were taking advantage of an opportunity to leave their mark. Hancock

⁵⁴ Ibid, 377.

⁵⁵ “Account of the Cork Institution,” *B.M.M.* Vol. I (1808), 187.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

admitted that “education, in its some degree, [is] the fashion of the day” but contended that his own interest was based on a deeper commitment to home life, to which he dedicated himself and he took pains to urge middle-class parents to “see how their respective families are educated...much was wanting in the system of education, and much was defective in parental vigilance on this subject.”⁵⁷ He cautioned “those parents make an erroneous calculation, who in the allotment of their time and attention, prefer to give the bent of their minds to make their children rich, or adorned only with superficial accomplishment, while the more valuable acquisition of a liberal and guarded education are neglected.”⁵⁸

It was inevitable that among numerous moralizing articles such as *On War*, *On Honesty* and *On Puffing*, “K” would dedicate an article to his thoughts *On Education*. In February of 1812 the concerned and increasingly jaundiced “K” lay down his gauntlet and declared:

There is a fashion in public sentiment...I am afraid of the fickleness of fashion in its giddy whirl interfering to withdraw public attention from this subject.

Despite his evident involvement and endorsement, he grouped the foundation of their Academical Institution with the attentions afforded to theatre and harp societies and argued that “now the instruction of the poorer classes under the Lancasterian system comes in for its little hour of engrossing public attention.”⁵⁹ Recognizing that the possibilities of education would have a more lasting, beneficial contribution, he acknowledged that:

To facilitate and cheapen the modes of communicating instruction in reading, writing and arithmetic is a plan recommended by benevolence and the soundest policy...with regard to individuals, this kind of instruction may materially contribute to enable them to proceed in the journey of life to the acquisitions of higher attainments in the grade of intellectual civilization.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ “On Education,” *B.M.M.* Vol. VIII (1812), 93.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

Hancock was rankled, however, by the notion that society should avoid educating the poor so as to prevent the lower classes from better understanding their rights. “I am an ardent advocate for this instruction,” he declared, “because I am persuaded that the more fully a man understand his rights, if he also understand and practise his duties he becomes a more valuable citizen and is better fitted to support his proper rank in society.”⁶¹ We thus have a very good idea of what qualities Hancock found most valuable in a citizen.

2.4 Hancock, Philanthropy and the Orders in Council

In February of 1812, “K” made a point of complementing an article that had appeared two months previous, offering praise for its discussion of the rise of the Independents, and providing another article in a similar vein for further reflection.⁶² It was an article describing how the Levellers had criticized the excesses of Cromwell and upheld four basic democratic principles: a freely elected parliament, the supremacy of the law, a fair law before which all men are equal, and an army to enforce the law and to defend the land. Hancock claimed to feel a connection with the Levellers;⁶³ he found the Levellers to be far ahead of their time and men of “the finest, sense, purest manners and most enlightened religion.”⁶⁴ It is not surprising that Hancock took inspiration from the Levellers, as he would have been attracted to their brand of political agitation because he had participated in similar activities himself. Despite the refrain in his writings

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² “Letter to the Proprietors,” *B.M.M.* Vol. VIII (1812), 93-4. Followed by a reprint of *The Leveller, or, the Principles & Maxims Concerning Government and Religion Which Are Asserted by Those That Are Commonly Called Levellers*, (London: Printed for Thomas Brewster, 1659).

⁶³ Where he first heard of them is not quite clear. The introduction refers to the “wonderful” stories of “infancy,” so it may have been from his mother, who came from the feisty Hunters of Lisburn. It is worth recalling that his maternal grandfather had been prepared to blockade the local authorities from intruding on the property of the local Quaker school; and that his mother had initiated a letter campaign against the executors of her husband’s will when she suspected her son’s inheritance was being handled improperly.

⁶⁴ Ibid; also quoted in Newhouse, “John Hancock, Junior: 1762-1823,” 48.

that he preferred peace and disliked conflict, throughout his life he systematically chose the inflexible and very clearly articulated position over any quiet and conciliatory option.

Hancock was willing to go to extremes for both his religion and his politics. Nevill Newhouse has speculated that Hancock must have become attracted to liberal and reformist views during the 1780s and 90s, at the height of the Volunteer era. Hancock was surely aware that there were Volunteers representing Lisburn in Parliament and that young William Drennan had published *Letters of Orellana*. Yet there is no obvious sign in the available sources that Hancock had any particular interest in politics during this period. It is unlikely that Hancock's interests or style were greatly affected by the presence of the Volunteers. Rather, the conflicts he had been exposed to during his early years, within the Society of Friends, had prepared him to stand his ground in the face of considerable opposition, all the while honing his particular brand of honest, blunt prose, itself a Quaker tradition. The only political event of the decade that clearly left an impression on him was a meeting of linendrapers held in Armagh sixteen years previous, which occurred in order to "oppose some oppressive encroachments, and by their firm procedure obtained the sought-for relief." He used the successful petition as an example during a special meeting of linendrapers in December 1808, contrasting the current "apathy and extinction of public spirit...of the meeting at Belfast" with a time, literally referred to as back "in the day," when "they resisted in a legal and constitutional manner, spoke their sentiments plainly and unequivocally, and the obnoxious measures were laid aside."⁶⁵

During his years as a Proprietor of *The Belfast Monthly Magazine* Hancock's diatribes were mainly focused on the disruption of trade caused by the Orders in Council. In 1806, George III issued an Order in Council to prohibit neutral vessels from entering ports on the French coast unless they carried domestic or British products. Napoleon retaliated with a similar decree. In January 1807 an Order in Council extended the blockade to allies of France and

⁶⁵ "Linen-Drapers at Armagh," *B.M.M.* Vol. I (1808), 401.

was soon followed by another that compelled neutral ships to call at British ports or be subject to a search by British authorities. Any non-compliance resulted in seizure. A final Order in Council in 1811 prohibited America from selling salt fish to the West Indies and imposed tariffs on everything brought in from American ports. The Proprietors expressed concern that the war with France had become less about the suppressing a tyrant on the continent and more about forcing unreasonable economic restrictions which affected the peaceful flow of trade necessary to the sustenance of the domestic population. The Commercial Reporter deplored the fact that “[t]he mutual restrictions on commerce which it is now becoming the short-sighted policy of nations to retaliate on each other will have a tendency to force trade into new channels, by which some will be gainers while others are losers.”⁶⁶ Hancock, speaking as the Commercial Reporter, found that “trade does not flourish in consequence of these pernicious regulations, but rather their baneful influence has not hitherto been able to repress our commercial energies”⁶⁷ and in March 1811 he despondently claimed “the habit of apathy is at present a desperate disease.”⁶⁸ Six months later, the Monthly Retrospect would question “to what angel, what divine meddler are we to ascribe this salutary interposition?” and answer:

-To the GENIUS of the British constitution...honest in its intentions, liberal in its deposition, and looking with magnanimous contempt, on every plausible [argument] for retaining the power of poignant persecution, disguised under the term—toleration.⁶⁹

Hancock’s arguments in this vein were often tied to policies that affected the working poor. In the reports Hancock often referred to himself as a Philanthropist and did not see any conflict between this and his title as Commercial Reporter; in fact, he viewed the concerns of each as reinforcing the other. To be involved in commerce, for the benefit of all society, was a mighty and pious act. While there

⁶⁶ “Commercial Report,” *B.M.M.* Vol. I (1808), 158.

⁶⁷ “Commercial Report,” *B.M.M.* Vol. IV (1810), 156.

⁶⁸ “On the Progressive Steps in Improvement,” *B.M.M.* Vol. VI (1811), 185.

⁶⁹ “Monthly Retrospect on Politics,” *B.M.M.* Vol. VII (1811), 224.

is no reason to believe this was not a genuine concern on his part, it is also reasonable to assume that the disruptions to his own business were a motivating factor. His chosen profession depended heavily on trading networks with the continent and North America. The Orders in Council interfered and he heaped disdain on the Napoleonic wars for being source of such inhibiting policies. Hancock found the act of war to be antithetical to all his most dearly held beliefs. He remained a committed pacifist despite his break with the Quakers and the withdrawal itself was partly due to what he believed was a hypocrisy within the Society where “few actually took up arms [in the Rebellion]; but many shewed that they had no dislike to draw gain to themselves from this corrupt fource, and to have their possessions defended by others, or at least that they were only prevented from joining more openly, by the outward rule, and not from a settled conviction of its inconsistency.”⁷⁰ He felt his conduct had no such inconsistencies and his aim to keep the handloom linen industry afloat was not only for the benefit of his own business but to keep the poor employed. His preference to keep the workers out of the factories and on their own small plots of land was derived from the same outlook. In January 1809 he noted that:

as the proprietor of a bleach-green, I have uniformly found that those who occupied a few acres of ground lived more comfortably than those who had only a home and small garden. As an employer I may have had cause sometimes to complain that my work may have suffered through their attention to their own business, but I am satisfied that they and their families were rendered more comfortable by the possession of their little allotment of land.⁷¹

His disapproval of the so-called vices of urban poverty was continually evident and he criticized “the wretchedness of the inmates of rows of the poor houses in the bye-lanes, and of some of the lodging houses in the principal streets of Lisburn” where “the poor of towns to suffer most, and probably their suffering are generally increased in proportion to the size of the towns. For the business of this assertion, I appeal to that part of Dublin called the Liberty, and to St. Giles, and

⁷⁰ Hancock, *A Friendly Expostulation, Addressed to the People Called Quakers*, 15.

⁷¹ “Letter to the Editor,” *B.M.M.* Vol. II (1809), 14.

similar places in London, where, in addition to the usual miseries of poverty, the want of fresh air, the contagion of disease.”⁷² His cure for this unsatisfactory state of affairs was to encourage the invigorating application of energies whether through work or education pursued during leisure time, yet those opportunities were also constrained by the priorities of wartime:

Bankruptcies multiplying, and with no prospect of their termination...work-people thrown out of employment, so that the weaver takes the place of the harvest labourer, and all find scarcity of work in order to produce a subsistence...To what are their accumulated difficulties and distresses, pervading almost all the classes of society owing? An answer may be returned in one short word THE WAR.⁷³

In Hancock’s schematic, war “forced capital, like the comet’s blaze into the erratic and lawless tack of speculation” and “encouraged the system of the extension of paper money” which “by the introduction of a factitious and fictitious capital, had a tendency to raise the price of the necessities of life, and enhance the expenses of living.”⁷⁴ The war raised taxes and people “who partook of its gains [rose] to sudden wealth,” encouraging the “sober citizen and industrious plodder...to ape the manners and expenses of the commercial aristocracy...”⁷⁵ He continued to object to the war through his pacifism, through his writings and by pursuing relief from the restrictions of the Orders in Council.

A letter to the Editor in December 1808, signed by a Friend to the Linen Trade, cautioned the propertied classes to refrain from hoarding flax and flax-seed in years of scarcity “as it is by the profits of the linen manufacture, their rents are chiefly paid.”⁷⁶ Several weeks later, these concerns about the supplies of flax gave rise to a meeting of the linen-drapers at Belfast where Hancock and two of his old associates, James Christy and James Nicholson, argued for sending a petition to England demanding a relaxation to the Order in Council so that flax could be imported from the United States. The proposal was soundly defeated, with the

⁷² Ibid, 15.

⁷³ “Commercial Report,” *B.M.M.* Vol. V (1810), 80.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ “Letter to the Editor,” *B.M.M.* Vol. I (1808), 249.

leaders of the opposing majority citing a preference to express their concerns through quiet, discrete channels. Not to be deterred, another meeting was arranged in Armagh, the heart of the linen triangle, and its details were subsequently transmitted to the public through a report in *The Belfast Monthly Magazine* by “a person who was present and who conceived that an impartial statement of the proceeding should be published as a register of public opinion on a highly important subject, and as a memorial of the passing events of the day.”⁷⁷ This was to remedy the low numbers that attended the meeting, which were “not nearly so many as considering the great importance of the subject, might have been expected, if public spirit had pervaded the trade.”⁷⁸ Although it is ostensibly the contribution of an “impartial” person present at this meeting of linen drapers in Armagh, the minute detail and enthusiastic endorsement of everything Hancock said, all dutifully recorded by Nicholson, seems to indicate that Hancock himself either wrote or aided in its composition.

An agenda was set to deal with a disruption of flax imports due to the ongoing war, and the opening comments were couched in Hancock’s usual criticisms of the nature of war depriving the people through personal suffering and indirect economic hardships. Hancock was concerned with obtaining enough flax for the coming year and was more than willing to pursue political agitation in order to obtain this import, unimpeded, over and above certain objections in the group. The bleacher Robert Williamson proposed an amendment to the proposition where local concerns would be expressed through informal channels, essentially nullifying the intent of the proposal, represented the opposition to Resolutions. Williamson could see no advantage to be gained by petition except to promote a change in administration and to him it was quite indifferent who was Chancellor of the Irish Exchequer: “Our petition would be certainly disregarded; for we could not expect better success than the merchants of Liverpool, and other places in England, who had petitioned parliament last session, against the orders

⁷⁷ “Meeting of the Linen-Drapers,” *B.M.M.* Vol. I (1808), 402.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

in council.”⁷⁹ If the orders were favourable to the general interest of the empire, “we, in one corner of it, could not expect a relaxation in our favour.”⁸⁰ He admitted the poor must suffer as well as the rich, but all must suffer in the attempts to repel the schemes of the common enemy.

John Hancock responded by remarking that most of the flaxseed bought for crushing was not fit for sowing. He noted that his previous attempt to gain support for a petition to the king was opposed by all then present and suggested that Williamson’s amendment appeared to be a deliberate distraction, “like throwing a tub to the whale, to divert its attention, and by a side winde to alter the course of the vessel.”⁸¹ He doubted that the embargo would be violated in America, and believed that no instance had occurred in France of an American ship being condemned, till after the date of the Orders in Council. He particularly objected to now addressing the same person whom the trade unanimously opposed in 1782, and who, he was convinced, would not “risk his place in remonstrating in strong terms against any favourite measure of the present administration.”⁸² He indicated his determination to persevere in his motion, though he “should even have to stand alone.”⁸³

Hancock would not find any degree of success in this measure, although he participated in many works of charity during this period.⁸⁴ The monthly retrospectives would continue to complain that flax supplies were dwindling, accompanied by high prices for what was available, crippling the industry. The warning was continually sounded that “if the necessary quantities of flax-seed be not procured before May, the consequences will indeed be serious,”⁸⁵ predicting

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid. Williamson had opposed a similar petition at the time.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Hancock aggressively sought a relaxation of capital punishment laws; he promoted safety in the linen industry; he started a spinning school for girls with John Rogers; he imported grain from India and sold it at cost to the poor during a year of shortage; his eulogy refers to many visits and monies being provided to those in need.

⁸⁵ “Monthly Retrospect,” *B.M.M.* Vol. II (1809), 89.

that half a million would be thrown out of employment in the North of Ireland. The Orders in Council were considered to be just in their principle but ineffective in their intent and most injurious to the domestic economy. The Proprietors suggested, no doubt controversially, “that the wise system of self-defensive neutrality, adopted by the American States, and their consistency and determination in maintaining it, will operate most powerfully in procuring peace to the world.”⁸⁶ In the meantime:

the War indeed goes on, without having any very evident end to be attained, but continues as it were by habit.⁸⁷

In the interim, Napoleon’s Moscow campaign cut off supplies of flax from the Baltic States. The English and Scottish flax spinners had to rely on Irish flax, exacerbating the problem: in 1810 Ireland exported 1073 cwt of raw flax to Great Britain; in 1811, this increased to 14,334 cwt and in 1812, 65,651 cwt. Westminster revoked the Orders in June of 1812, recognizing that their own economy was in shambles but having already provoked the American Senate into declaring war. Inertia propelled exports for a while longer, peaking in 1813 at 69,191 cwt. However in 1814 exported flax sharply declined to 24,363 cwt.⁸⁸ The Proprietors rejoiced at the revocation of the hated legislation, eulogizing and burying it with words (see Figure 1⁸⁹):

2.5 Old Conflicts and the Impending Mechanization of Linen

The public display of differences between Hancock and Williamson reflected old conflicts and connections in the Lagan Valley. Both bleachers were involved in the repeated change in ownership of a prominent residential property in Lambeg, later known as Glenmore, and their connection to this property bears mentioning because of its contemporary and later historical significance. The property at

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Hugh Lawlor, "Rise of the Linen Merchants in the Eighteenth Century," *Fibre and Fabrics Journal* 8 (1942).

⁸⁹ *B.M.M.* Vol VIII (1812), 62-63.

PROPOSED INSCRIPTION FOR THE LID OF A CHEST, IN THE ARCHIVES OF THE PRIVY COUNCIL.

Beneath, are deposited
all that remains of the once celebrated

ORDERS IN COUNCIL.

Circumscribed by this narrow boundary,
and reduced to a few shreds
of worthless parchment,
those haughty and innovating Decrees,
which, in their life-time, convulsed Empires,
and tore the scanty morsel
from the grasp of starving Millions,
now repose in harmless obscurity.
Thro' the baser passions of the human heart,
the *moral* Genealogist
may perhaps trace their origin to a remote distance ;
but their immediate progenitors, were
MALICIOUSNESS and INFATUATION.
Fostered by unremitting parental care,
and the laborious exertions of their nearest relatives,
SOPHISTRY and FALSHOOD,
they rapidly attained
a formidable and disgraceful maturity.
During a disastrous period
of Six Years,
they exercised an uncontrolled oppression
over the Industry and Resources of the Poor ;
Polluted the National Reputation for Commercial Integrity
with the most loathsome villanies ;
Cherished the infant Manufactures of our Rivals ;
and insulted the Public Rights of Mankind ;
by a long series of hateful and aggressive Depredations.
Their career was at length arrested
by the awakened energies of their victims ;
and after a resistance
which only proved the genuine cowardice of Tyranny
when opposed to the united efforts of
Rectitude and Patriotism—
overwhelmed by the contempt of the Wise,
and the execrations of the Good,
they expired June 16th, 1812.
On the same day,
their only legitimate descendant,
THE LICENCE SYSTEM,
shared the fate of its guilty parents ;
and their death is thus recorded
By a British Public,
as an Event
awfully instructive to future Legislators,
and strongly illustrative
of the consolatory and important Truth,
that it is essential to the very Nature of Evil,
to issue in its own Destruction.

Figure 1: "BENEATH, ARE DEPOSITED ALL THAT REMAINS OF THE ONCE CELEBRATED ORDERS IN COUNCIL."

Lambeg was near where Louis Crommelin had established his bleachgreen and during the period of rebellion was one of the foremost bleachgreens in the Valley, where experiments on chemical bleaching were being conducted by Hancock and his neighbor, the Quaker John Richardson, which allowed operations to continue through the winter. Richardson would later amalgamate this property into his own holdings and renamed it Glenmore, which those familiar with the history of linen will recognize as being one of the largest linen bleachgreen operations in the Empire. During the handloom weaver days, whoever possessed this property was ultimately at the forefront of the industry.⁹⁰

The house on the property was probably built early in the seventeenth century,⁹¹ around the same time that Robert's ancestor, John Williamson, established a bleach-green in the area (1626).⁹² Robert's father, Dr. John Williamson, known "the famous bleacher of Lambeg," purchased the house in 1760.⁹³ John Williamson would also play a prominent part in the development of the linen industry by seeking to change regulations on both the use of lime, and the use of seals. Williamson obtained permission from the Linen Board to perform a series of experiments where he finished a number of pieces using his new process.⁹⁴ He submitted them to Dublin for examination by the Board, which admitted the superiority of the finish but denied him endorsement through a White Seal. Hugh McCall has suggested that this amounted to a censure of his somewhat

⁹⁰ After the Hancock-Williamson years it came to the Richardsons in the 1830s and was transformed into the huge Glenmore operation. It held the Linen Research Institute for the twentieth century and recently Coca-Cola purchased the industrial portion and turned it into a bottling plant. The house is still standing but has been subdivided into apartments.

⁹¹ Harold Cecil Marshall, *The Parish of Lambeg* (Lisburn: Victor McMurray, 1933), 114.

⁹² Francis Seymour, 1st Viscount Conway, was the first owner. During his residence it was referred to as "the Lord's House."

⁹³ He has been referred to as Doctor, see Lawlor, "Rise of the Linen Merchants in the Eighteenth Century," 59-60. At that time he owned practically the rest of the village; see Kathleen Rankin, *The Linen Houses of the Lagan Valley: The Story of Their Families* (Belfast: Ulster Historical Foundation, 2002), 93.

⁹⁴ For more on legal restrictions on lime use, see Frederick Page, "Lime in the Early Bleaching Industry of Britain 1633-1828: Its Prohibition and Repeal," *Annals of Science* 60 (2003).

aggressive personality.⁹⁵ In May 1762, Williamson had a by-law passed by the Trustees of the Linen Board where brown linens were to be sealed so as to certify that webs were of proper length, breadth and workmanship. In response, several hundred discontented weavers assembled in Lisburn and searched the streets for him, brandishing their blackthorn sticks; this became known as the weavers “turn-out.” The rioters eventually set off for Lambeg and surrounded his house. By the time Lord Hillsborough arrived with support, considerable damage had been done to the building and Williamson, “naturally much disappointed and annoyed,”⁹⁶ returned to London. Although John Williamson’s sons eventually followed him in the Linen trade, it would appear that immediately after his retirement the Lambeg works were occupied for some years by David Barclay, who was closely associated with the Williamsons.⁹⁷ The property next came into the hands of Hancock, who enlarged the house considerably and carried out many improvements.⁹⁸ Shortly after the rebellion, Hancock relinquished the house at Lambeg and settled into another one of his residences in Lisburn. Henry Bell (a relative of the Williamsons) briefly took over the property, and then, in 1808, returned it to John Williamson’s sons, at the same time Robert became Hon. Secretary of the Belfast Committee of the Linen trade.⁹⁹ The transactions in politics and real estate correspond. Hancock possessed this property during the turbulent 1790s, when liberalism and intellectual inquiry was fermenting; but in the conservative post-union period the Williamson star was once again on the rise, while Hancock drifted into a relatively high profile but somewhat impotent liberal fringe.

⁹⁵ Hugh McCall, *Ireland and Her Staple Manufactures: Being Sketches of the History and Progress of the Linen and Cotton Trades More Especially in the Northern Province*, 2nd ed. (Belfast: Greer, 1865).

⁹⁶ Lawlor, "Rise of the Linen Merchants in the Eighteenth Century," 60.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ The exact date of possession is unknown, but in all probability occurred around the time of his marriage. Also see Rankin, *The Linen Houses of the Lagan Valley: The Story of Their Families*, 94.

⁹⁹ Lawlor, "Rise of the Linen Merchants in the Eighteenth Century," 61.

In the next decades, the Ulster linen industry would transform in a burst of industrial energy. Crawford contends that “[t]he linen-trade in Ireland was especially vulnerable to the introduction of machine-spinning because it was enmeshed in the social system, especially as that system was based on agriculture.”¹⁰⁰ He notes Robert Williamson’s statement during meetings of a select committee of the House of Commons inquiring into the linen trade of Ireland (1825):

[T]he linen trade is so constituted in Ireland and the capital so subdivided and spread abroad over the population, that the present mode is the best adapted to the circumstances of the country...In short, it is one of those already established things which you find as it is, and you are obliged to use the best means with respect to it in your power: to alter it (were it even desirable) you must re-cast the state of society and ...re-model that of property.¹⁰¹

Williamson upheld the common view that slow mechanization of linen production reflected an unfortunate social problem. He admitted that he would welcome having machinery for spinning linen introduced, even knowing that it would throw the manufacture into the hands of large manufacturers. Ireland was already losing several branches of the manufacture to the Scots, including strong sheeting such as diapers, coarse damask diapers and dowlas, because the Scottish mill-spun yarn was easier to bleach and more consistent in quality. Williamson was able to convince himself that the introduction of mill-spinning into Ireland would not destroy hand-spinning:

[b]ecause there is room enough both, and the population, dense as it is, requires employment in both ways. Nor is it possible to direct capital generally over Ireland for mill-spinning; I should think that the new manufacture would rather fix itself in those portions of Ireland that are rich, and extend the other back to those unfortunate districts that have not the linen manufacture, or any other.¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ W.H. Crawford. “The Evolution of the Linen Trade in Ulster before Industrialization,” *Irish Economic and Social History* XV (1988), 51.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid, 51.

Williamson underestimated the devastating impact that the introduction of mill-spinning would have on districts dependent on the sale of fine hand-spun yarns to the triangle. With the shift to mechanized production, Ulster linen lost not only the markets but also local entrepreneurs,¹⁰³ which realized Hancock's worst fears.

¹⁰³ Ibid. Cf. Kenneth R. Andrews et al., *The Westward Enterprise: English Activities in Ireland, the Atlantic, and America, 1480-1650* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1979). Also see Joel Mokyr, "Industrialization and Poverty in Ireland and the Netherlands," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 10:3 (1980), 429-458. Mokyr discusses a failure to industrialize and impact of the famine; he also addresses Michael Hechter's related theories on internal colonialism; see Michael Hechter, *Internal Colonialism: The Celtic Fringe in British National Development, 1536-1966* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975).

3

“THE LIGHT OF THE TIMES:”

THE DEMISE OF LIBERALISM IN BELFAST

During the years of publishing *The Belfast Monthly Magazine*, its Proprietors sought to provide a mirror for what was happening both locally and internationally. Much of the commentary in the magazine is sharply critical of the political and economic situation in the Atlantic triangle and how it affected the domestic scene. The readership would have recognized that the structure of the Irish colony was riddled with problems. Ongoing hostility proliferated from religious divisions and economic hardships. The Irish, both Catholic and Protestant, were resentful of constricting legislation imposed on Ireland to the benefit of the rest of Britain but they were without recourse as they were excluded from the European continent so long as France and England remained at odds. Those who had supported Union were sorely disappointed when Union did not deliver the anticipated improvements in economic ties. At the end of its run in 1814, the Proprietors made it clear that they felt that Belfast could be “taken as a pretty fair representation of the empire at large” and they offered a sample of “upwards of 40 failures, great and small, some of them of great magnitude, [which] have taken place within the last eight months.”¹ In broad strokes, *The Belfast Monthly Magazine* became the ongoing commentary of three men watching their dreams of liberalism, Enlightenment and prosperity in Ireland come crashing down.

¹ *B.M.M* Vol. XIII (1814), 535.

3.1 Liberalism, Public Opinion and Cessation of Publication

The Proprietors were part of a liberal remnant that had argued for parliamentary reform, and demonstrated interest in deism and support for a level of interdenominational cooperation. Margaret Jacob has suggested that late in the eighteenth century, a group of affluent English, Dutch and French-speaking men and women managed to transcend gender and localism and carry on “an international republican conversation.”² Jacob describes the mental universe of that republic as containing a public that was “[f]ramed by the quality and quantity of its readers, courted by novelists, exhorted by journalists, only then to be shocked by philosophes and pornographers.”³ This “public” was the very same entity that *The Belfast Monthly Magazine* routinely addressed and Jacob’s description remains very appropriate even though her commentary focuses on an earlier period and the Proprietors were observing the late stages of the Napoleonic wars. This is because the political leanings of the Proprietors predated the uprisings of 1798, which were in turn inspired by the success of equivalent republican movements in France and America. The remnant of liberalism remaining in Ulster in the post-Union period was not rabidly republican; they were certainly involved in Jacob’s republican conversation but committing to the United Irishmen, reviving republicanism, and promoting reform could be very different activities in the North. Depending on their individual circumstances, the publishers and readers of *The Belfast Monthly Magazine* may have either joined, sympathized with or deplored the British radical societies,⁴ and, like many reformers and democrats elsewhere, many of the Ulster reformists were horrified with the excesses of the French Revolution and subsequent Napoleonic state. The separatist movement of their youth argued that an Irish rebellion was politically in

² Margaret C. Jacob, "The Mental Landscape of the Public Sphere: A European Perspective," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 28, no. 1 (1994), 99-100.

³ Ibid, 95-6.

⁴ These would have included, for example, the Society of Constitutional Information and the London Corresponding Society. See Michael Durey, "Thomas Paine's Apostles: Radical Emigres and the Triumph of Jeffersonian Republicanism," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 44, no. 4 (1989).

tandem with the inevitable laws of historical evolution, and would sweep away an anachronistic political situation.⁵ Local rebels were certain that when universalism replaced particularism and permeated the Irish body politic, a clear, unambiguous and modern rule of law would follow.⁶ At the height of unrest, *The Northern Star* had boasted that Ulster had “long been the first to assert and maintain the liberties of Ireland—Antrim has in general led the way, and Down was ever emulous to vie with her.”⁷ The Rebellion’s bid to sever ties with Britain depended upon unreliable foreign assistance and ultimately failed, costing 20,000 lives in the process. Ardent reformers had been reduced to a state of inactivity during a conservative backlash in the post-Union years, but the backlash was not all encompassing. The essayists in *The Belfast Monthly Magazine* intended to provide something of a reality check against the general impression that Ulster was over-run with loyalist propaganda and the revival of anti-Popery.

While the coverage of *The Belfast Monthly Magazine* is neither comprehensive nor without bias, it is at least heartfelt enough to provide an impression of the worldview of these men. The Proprietors created consensus amongst themselves by deploring any subjection of the Irish population and economy to the benefit of greater Britain. They were intensely aware that before and after Union, Ireland continued to be treated as an afterthought and an annoyance by Westminster. Under these circumstances, it was understandable that the Proprietors felt some consternation at the prospect of being both Irish and British, and their deep unease was revealed in an early editorial:

As for ourselves, we are not yet so perfectly assimilated with the selfish passions and prejudices of our neighbours, as implicitly to believe that every one of us has a Englishman’s head placed upon his Irish shoulders...

⁵ Kevin Whelan, “The United Irishmen, the Enlightenment and Popular Culture,” in *The United Irishman*, David Dickson, Daire Keogh, and Kevin Whelan, *The United Irishmen: Republicanism, Radicalism, and Rebellion* (Dublin: The Lilliput Press, 1993).

⁶ Ibid, 269.

⁷ *The Northern Star* was the newspaper of the United Irishmen. Excerpted in Henry Joy, *Historical Collections Relative to the Town of Belfast: From the Earliest Period to the Union with Great Britain* (Belfast: G. Berwick, 1817), 438.

seeing with our own eyes, hearing with our own ears and judging by the dictates of our own understanding, we conclude that our situation, apart and retired as it is, may be more favourable to our political observation and speculation than if we were placed nearer to the capital or transformed into the blow-pipe and of the passions and prejudices of English parties. IRELAND IS OUR STATION.⁸

These Ulstermen had a unique viewpoint, for while the cleavage between the elite and the so-called mere Irish was stark in the south, the protestant Northerners were a numerical majority within their region and only conditionally attached to Britain. They were acting their part as the heirs of Robbins' commonwealthmen. Robbins claimed that Irish Protestants were burdened with a situation which forced an outpouring of ideas "potentially revolutionary and useful to rebellious colonists, to critics of mercantilism, and to supporters of full civil and religious liberties for all mankind,"⁹ specifying that "not all Whigs were reformers, not all Tories proponents of passive resistance; and practically none of them were adherents of the exiled Stuarts."¹⁰

What is less clear is how the Gaelic Irish presence affected the Anglo and Scottish colonizers. The Anglo-Irish were forced to reconcile being Irish to the English and English to the Irish, and some of this eventually involved showing interest in Gaelic-Catholic history as a part of the national culture.¹¹ While acknowledging their connection to the larger island, their political priorities were shaped by the immediate presence of the Other, which they interacted with on a level that was not possible on English domestic territory. It affected both the level of conservatism and the level of radicalism in Ulster, and inspired much rhetoric

⁸ "Monthly Retrospect of Politics," *B.M.M.* Vol. I (1808), 385.

⁹ Robbins, *The Eighteenth-Century Commonwealthman: Studies in the Transmission, Development, and Circumstance of English Liberal Thought from the Restoration of Charles II until the War with the Thirteen Colonies*, 135; see also Margaret C. Jacob, "Newtonianism and the Origins of the Enlightenment: A Reassessment," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 11, no. 1 (1977), 7.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ An example would be Edward Bunting, who collected Gaelic music and adapted it to the piano forte in what can be viewed as an almost anthropological attempt to preserve what was perceived as a dying culture. See Davis, "Sequels of Colonialism: Edward Bunting's Ancient Irish Music."

on the unfairness of Westminster's treatment of the Irish junta. The Anglo-Irish were not treated as "English" anywhere else in Britain and were in fact functioning in what would be called as a hybrid or multicultural society in present terminology. At the time, they relied on the metaphor of the amphibian to explain their position in the British world.¹²

The Irish situation prevented the Enlightenment from sustaining widespread support in the area. Ulster's middle-class were politicized but their dual nature – where they were considered to be Irish to the English and English to the Irish – prevented them from rallying the interdenominational support necessary to throw off the political stranglehold of Westminster. In the North, the English Anglican Ascendancy was challenged by the presence of a large group of middle-class Dissenters who drew attention to the fact that Ireland's ability to legislate was only at the pleasure of the larger British parliament. The Dissenters' complaints of discriminatory policies were not taken seriously by the Catholic majority, who were in a much more dire situation and therefore any hope for republican liberalism in Ireland was hamstrung from the outset.

Nevertheless, the thoroughness of the failure of liberalism in Ulster is remarkable. The popularity of the New Lights only decades before, the connections with Scottish universities and the presence of French language training have already been discussed. These factors, accompanied by the recent rebellion against British authority and coupled with ties to and interest in independent America, would seem to suggest that liberalism ought to have had a ready audience in Ulster. The frustration experienced by Proprietors in their literary undertakings confirms this was not the case. A credible liberal faction may have been maintained as a sizeable minority if economic problems had not quickened its demise. The weakness of the colonial economic system, with its dependency on steady exports and related "boom and bust" cycles, is now part of the economic canon, but was then only just beginning to be understood. The boom that occurred when the handloom weavers were in their heyday had met a

¹² Jim Smyth, "'Like Amphibious Animals': Irish Protestants, Ancient Britons, 1691-1707," *Historical Journal* 36, no. 4 (1993), 785-797.

bust period while politics interfered with demand and new technology adjusted the need for labour. The public, such that it was, would not support experiments in social and political improvement when individuals continued to struggle for personal security in an area that was marked by incessant change and instability. In only two centuries, the area had witnessed a massive demographic transformation, accompanied by the clearance of ancient woodlands and implementation of a colonial economy based on exporting linen and foodstuffs. Ulster had been transformed from a Gaelic Catholic backwater in to what residents felt should have been a model British colony. In many ways the pace of change in the area was breathtaking; ultimately, that uncertainty fed conservatism.

The Proprietors abandoned publication during the Congress of Vienna. The negotiations marked the end of the Napoleonic Wars, which provided a convenient point to resign, as the ongoing wars had dominated so much of their commentary. As the details of the settlements were released, the Proprietors realized the Council was also initiating a wave of reactionary conservatism, rising industrialism and expanded colonialism. Despite this, the Proprietors claimed that they “continually fluctuated between sanguine hope, and sad experience” and they wished for:

the most glorious occasion that ever had occurred in dreary history, for, at length, fixing firmly the august authority of sovereign on the rock pedestal of national rights and personal liberties; thus consolidating into one uniform design and cementing into one consistent purpose, the powers of the monarch, and the principles of the republican.¹³

This was not to be, and the final passages of the *Magazine* were filled with pathos as Drennan and Hancock offered a lengthy retrospective summarizing the ongoing negotiations at the Congress of Vienna along with musings on what their own efforts had failed to accomplish.

The final Retrospect was constructed so that each of the two writers who authored it over the years were given the opportunity to “[express] his individual

¹³ “Monthly Retrospect,” *B.M.M.* Vol. XIII (1814), 532.

independent sentiments” and “make his final bow.”¹⁴ They remarked that the turbulence on the continent which they had faithfully reported on and fretted over was drawing to a close, bringing an end to what they had referred to as “the black page of the present eventful period”¹⁵ where “dreadful and destructive wars...have continued so long with little intermission, and which so far from accomplishing the purposes of our own safety.”¹⁶ The details of the conclusion to the war, however, were deemed to be unsatisfactory. Although the liberal Proprietors had “sustained many heavy disappointments,” they had still “bundled up all our hopes and wishes, our prosaics, our poetics, and our philanthropics, and laid them, silently and submissively at the feet of Alexander [of Russia].”¹⁷ They hoped that in him, they would find:

the spirit of improvement was, as it were, beginning at the crown of the head, from whence it would descend to the sole of the foot. Experience had shewn the danger and uncertainty, in the advancement of the world, by revolutionary starts, and bounds, and the constant liability of the wheels catching fire by their rapid rotation.¹⁸

Their ultimate disappointment occurred when Saxony, “containing almost two million industrious inhabitants, most strongly attached to their country, their constitution, and their king”¹⁹ was annexed to Prussia with the approval of the Great Powers. As the Proprietors were individuals who had argued vehemently for their own rights as citizens only two decades before, they found this political compromise completely unacceptable. They challenged their audience to witness Britain’s imperial expansion and the progress of autocracy on the continent with great suspicion. Much criticism was heaped upon both the British government and the British public. The Proprietors clarified that the English were “a sovereign people, [rather] than a few community. To all around them, even to their own brethren, they bear that distant deportment, those repulsive manners, and hard

¹⁴ Ibid, 532.

¹⁵ “Anonymous editorial,” *B.M.M.* Vol. I (1809), 138.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ “Monthly Retrospect,” *B.M.M.* Vol. XIII (1814), 510.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

indifference, which characterize a proud potentiaie rather than the chief member of a political union.”²⁰ Drennan took it upon himself to issue a warning to Britain, lest those “sudden reverses which may happen to states as well as individuals...make England the Elba of the world, [and] your very children may not rejoice in the dissolution of the parents, and find an end to their captivity in his fall.”²¹ The tone of cautious amelioration that characterized the original introduction was entirely absent and Drennan directly enquired whether Ireland would ever be taken seriously unless it outright rebelled:

Why this constant indirect invective against the system of policy adopted by Great Britain...why? Because Britain forces us to pursue the principles of civil and religious freedom, to pursue her own genuine constitution into France, into Poland, into Norway, into America, and even to find its principles and its practices so far from home. Why this invective against the British public? Because that public has never manifested respect for our rights, nor sympathy with our suffering... taking from us our country, she has denied us her own. She has made us, at least more the citizens of the world; we are Norwegians, we are Poles, we are Italians, we are Frenchmen (though never of a French party) but as yet, we are not Britons...²²

Their references to public opinion and public apathy were particularly telling. The Proprietors were forced to admit that public opinion in Ulster did not favour liberalism and therefore doomed the incremental reform they craved. The retrospect claimed that the Proprietors had long wondered “what is the public and where is the people?”²³ and eventually concluded that:

We have, in this corner of the globe, seen a leaden weight swinging, with a *vis inertiae*, between apathy and anarchy, but that, surely, is not a people. We enter a printing office, and looking at the mass of type cast together as they have just come from the foundery, unassorted, unassimilated, unconnected, we say, within ourselves – there is our people! – there congregated, yet scattered, approximated by nature, yet adverse in every angle, and unaccommodating to each other, they lie in an inactive and irrational individuality, matter with form, unless the creative band of the compositor gives a meaning, an understanding, a common sense, a common soul, and acting under a higher inspiration combines a

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid, 516.

²² Ibid, 424-5.

²³ Ibid, 513.

grand and outliving work from these elements of a public, this alphabet of people.²⁴

Drennan complemented the opening sketch of Ulster rotating amongst the political planetary system with this parting vision of an “alphabet of people” waiting for organization. Despite their frustration, the Proprietors still considered the cultivation of public opinion to be vital because “grand revolutionary epochs” occur not only “from time to time to time...but at all times, and extending gradually to all places is the influence of great men,”²⁵ Drennan’s prime example being the continuing influence of Sir Francis Bacon, who affected

such men as Montesquieu in France, and Locke in England, [men who] have in reality created that fund of public opinion, the accumulation of which by other authorities forms an universal republic, which as present, and we trust, more, in the future, will be looked up to with reverence by the congress of kings. This, called by some the light of the times, is we understand by PUBLIC OPINION.²⁶

Drennan confessed that “[o]n the whole, we have been received by the public with rather a dispiriting indifference.”²⁷ This echoed the complaints of Hancock, who, speaking as the Commercial Reporter, had found in March 1811 that “trade does not flourish in consequence of these pernicious regulations [the Orders in Council], but rather their baneful influence has not hitherto been able to repress our commercial energies”²⁸ but despaired of any remedy and despondently claimed “the habit of apathy is at present a desperate disease.”²⁹ This may be interpreted as an excuse borne of disappointment, but even so, his remedy for the situation is intriguing for both its impracticality and its sense of history, coming as it did from a latter-day “commonwealthman”:

The few who are enlightened, must keep before the multitude, endeavour to draw them on, and incessantly stimulate to virtuous exertions. To such precursors, and heralds of reform, mankind have in all ages been greatly

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid, 514.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ “Commercial Report,” *B.M.M.* Vol. IV (1810), 156.

²⁹ “On the Progressive Steps in Improvement,” *B.M.M.* Vol. VI (1811), 185.

indebted, and found among them their best benefactors; and these have been in the end repaid for all the obloquy thrown on them by the revilers of merit and been amply compensated by the calm approbation of their own minds, and the grateful tribute of a judicious few. The name of Milton, Sidney, Locke and many other illustrious defenders of liberty, will be remembered with will merited gratitude, as the friends of man...³⁰

The Proprietors similarly reprinted an address from Templeton to the Belfast Historic Society where he admonished the audience to immerse themselves in the lessons of the past, for:

[t]he page of the historian forms the connecting link between the former and the present age. On it we view as in a glass, man in every stage with one hand grasping at heaven, while with the other he clings to the infernal regions. It is the canvass on which is portrayed the virtues and vices of mankind. It is the Polar Star to guide us on our course...³¹

In the same vein, Hancock had previously contended that “[i]t has been said that it is wrong to revive the recollection of [the Rebellion]. I think otherwise.”³²

Hancock had been amongst a small group of Friends taken prisoner in Enniscorthy and transported to the rebel’s camp on Vinegar Hill. They were questioned and most were set at liberty, which was then considered quite remarkable. However, Hancock was detained at the camp for two days and witnessed a mass, later described as “an awful spectacle, to see so vast a multitude, many in a state of brutal intoxication, and their arms yet reeking of the blood of their fellow-creatures, presuming to invoke the God of Peace to pour a blessing on their recent acts, and to prosper the ferocious designs they were still harbouring against their unoffending countrymen.”³³ In *The Belfast Monthly Magazine*, Hancock had referred to the state of Wexford during “the distressful period of 1798” as containing “important lessons of instruction both to the people and to the rulers.”

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ “Address to the Belfast History Society,” *B.M.M.* Vol. XIII (1814), 190-1.

³² “For the Belfast Monthly Magazine,” *B.M.M.* Vol. I (1809), 138.

³³ Thomas Hancock, *The Principles of Peace, Exemplified in the Conduct of the Society of Friends in Ireland, During the Rebellion of the Year 1798, The Garland Library of War and Peace* (New York: Garland Publishing Co., 1974), 94-7.

...the former may see danger of resisting established power, but any other force, than the force of public opinion, exerted with coolness and firmness, so as to bring the majority to see the general good, and to act so as to promote it. Governors may also see the dangers arising from a system of coercion and of power improperly exercised. But to attempt to bury the past in oblivion is a fruitless effort. History will record in a black page, the excesses and errors committed by both sides; and a lasting memorial that cannot be obliterated, while memory holds it place, is recorded in the recollection of thousands.³⁴

For his part, Drennan referred to the reform of governments as being “nothing else than the initiation of the people at large into their proper manhood,”³⁵ a comment based on Kantian notion that Enlightenment is man’s emergence from his self-incurred immaturity, and immaturity is the inability to use one’s own understanding without guidance. The Proprietors sought governmental reform as an initiation of the public but despaired at the lack of will in the public.

In some ways, this was a situation that was specific to Ireland. In contrast to the apathy which frustrated the Proprietors, their contemporaries in Upper Canada “came to understand authority and themselves in new ways” through debate by “a reading public that, though informed by men of learning, was itself the ultimate judge.”³⁶ Jeffrey McNairn has identified this time as the point when “the Kantian Enlightenment...arrived in the backwoods of North America.”³⁷ In Upper Canada, public debate was advocated as both a virtue and a necessity:

The idea that authoritative decisions about the common good could and should be generated by critical discussion among private persons outside the control of traditional authorities of the most privilege was revolutionary. Complete with contradictions and unfulfilled promises, it marked the birth of the modern political order.³⁸

³⁴ “For the Belfast Monthly Magazine,” *B.M.M.* Vol. I (1809), 138.

³⁵ “Monthly Retrospect,” *B.M.M.* Vol. XIII (1814), 511.

³⁶ A term used to describe the community of scholars since the seventeenth century. See Jeffrey L. McNairn, *The Capacity to Judge: Public Opinion and Deliberative Democracy in Upper Canada, 1791-1854* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 3.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 7.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*

Classical public opinion required a collective search for the best possible answer, which was discovered through reasonable, prolonged public debate where “[p]articipants, not their opinions, were equal.”³⁹ The Proprietors unsuccessfully attempted to rouse this type of debate in the Ulster colony, or at least failed to ignite any interest in their own arguments. Instead, Hancock felt that they had merely “exposed the apathy, and almost total decay of public spirit in the province of Ulster, and more especially in the town of Belfast.”⁴⁰ It seems that this difference can be attributed to Ireland’s experience of rebellion and Union. In the Canadas, the greater connection with Britain was sought as both a practical goal and an ideal, where emulation of political and social forms became a method of maintaining a connection with Europe. In Ireland, Union occurred as a disciplinary exercise, demoralizing the majority of the population.

The Proprietors would also continue to harbour some resentment towards Irish Catholics, who they felt were not sufficiently appreciative or interested in the reformers’ efforts to petition on their behalf. Drennan clung to the idea of emancipation in principle, placing Catholic emancipation into the Newtonian description he had provided in the first issue:

Of the principle of universal equality of civil and religious rights for Catholics Lutherans, and Calvinists, being established, practically established, throughout the German empire...this single principle, placed in the centre of the social institution, must spread light and heat, and vitality, through the whole, and the different constituted authorities would move around it, with the silence and order of the planetary system.⁴¹

However, Drennan also remarked that “We are universalists in the cause of political liberty, and of this universalism, this transcendent Catholicism, their emancipation is but one of the sections.”⁴² Hancock provided a more complete explanation, noting that “[o]n the important subject of parliamentary reform much could be said, if the public could be interested on the subject; but in relations to it there is not an open ear. Protestants are sunk either in apathy or despair: and

³⁹ Ibid, 6.

⁴⁰ “Monthly Retrospect,” *B.M.M.* Vol. XIII (1814), 512.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid, 517.

Catholics are fully engrossed in their own affairs, almost to the exclusion of all others of general interest.”⁴³ He felt that this was a miscalculation, for the Catholic majority ought to be more supportive of the advocates of reform, who he declared to be “on principle the truest friends to Catholic Emancipation” and complained that

[i]t is not a valid excuse, to allege that they have no right to interfere till they are admitted to the full benefits of the constitution. They are embarked in one common bottom, and if they are still unjustly prevented from appearing before the mast, they ought to be desirous to see a clean ship, that they may hereafter...have the full benefit of it.⁴⁴

They discontinued their efforts, confident that their principles remained intact. As a farewell, Hancock provided his own political testament, which declared:

a firm adherence to the principles of civil and religious liberty: a zealous advocacy of the equal right of conscience and of the cause of Catholic emancipation, as an act of justice and sound policy, essential to the peace and prosperity of this county: a fearless and undaunted opposition to the Orange system, as unjust in its principle, cruel and malevolent in its rise and progress, and tending in an especial manner to sever all the charities of brotherhood and good neighbourhood. Above all, as a security for all the others, and as the only means of attaining them, and preserving them when attained...the utmost zeal for parliamentary reform, and [a] readiness to cooperate in all legal measure for the attainment of it.⁴⁵

Drennan reflected they had “endeavoured, to the best of our abilities and without our whole hearts, in the small circle around us, to advance the progress of public spirit, or rather to retard its decline.”⁴⁶ He decided that they had “outlived, though no Nestors, three of four generations of patriots, and are likely to outlive a fifth... Has the patriot deserted the country, or the country, the patriot?”⁴⁷ It seemed to him that there was little avail to attempt to gain “popularity where there is no people – no public.”⁴⁸ Hancock claimed a “virtuous pride, conscious of having

⁴³ Ibid, 530.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 520.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 515.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 522.

deserved well for uprightness of intention, which disdains to complain of the want of popular favour or of public ingratitude, in return for disinterested service.”⁴⁹ He found himself sceptical of any revival of public spirit and chose to conclude with a quote from his dear friend Edward Rushton, “May we never be popular in bad times.”⁵⁰

3.2 The Demise and Legacy of the Proprietors

Drennan died in 1820, specifying in his will that six Catholics and six Protestants should carry him past the Belfast Academical Institute on his way out to be buried. With his decease and the establishment of Queen’s College the liberal traditions established with the Institute almost died out.⁵¹ Hancock passed on three years later, with a large funeral reported on in both the local newspapers, *The Belfast Newsletter* and *The Commercial Chronicle*. The Proprietors’ old friend Dr. Robert Tennant provided the eulogy, which was reprinted in its entirety. Tennant was vehement in his tribute to Hancock’s principles and contribution:

John Hancock had no formal creed, religious or political, but the fervent aspiration of his heart was –glory to God in the highest, on earth peace, and good will towards men: this he thought could never be attained without freedom—that freedom which becomes men possessing reason, and desirous of happiness; who should not only be free to secure that happiness, but encourage and directed by freely chosen collective wisdom in the pursuit of it. This made him the ardent and zealous advocate of liberty, the uncompromising enemy of corruption in the State or Church, and of all tyranny or assumed power in either, inconsistent with the perfect exercise of individual exertion to procure a man’s own good, and that of the society of which he is a member. Our late friend was a Reformer indeed...he went to the root of the matter both as to the external system and the internal qualifications, by which alone that system can be advanced to perfection; he would have man stand erect in freedom, that he

⁴⁹ Ibid, 532.

⁵⁰ Edward Rushton was a blind poet from Liverpool. He was a dedicated Abolitionist and sympathized with the Irish and American independence cause.

⁵¹ Robbins, *The Eighteenth-Century Commonwealthman: Studies in the Transmission, Development, and Circumstance of English Liberal Thought from the Restoration of Charles II until the War with the Thirteen Colonies*, 175.

might successfully their dispositions, which confer upon freedom all its value. To this end all his efforts were directed, his writing breathed the same spirit, and his precepts were powerfully recommended by his example. Indeed agreeable to his own doctrine, his life was a practical comment on moral and political science: he devoted himself to practical utility, and all his extraordinary powers were employed with an energy rarely witnessed, to do good, and to communicate good, to all within the sphere of his activity.⁵²

In an act of post-mortem reconciliation, Hancock was buried in the Quaker graveyard in Lisburn. Much of his remaining bleachgreens and property in Lambeg soon came into the hands of the Richardson dynasty. Therefore, in Gill's economic history of Irish linen Hancock is mentioned only as being a neighbour and friend of Jonathon Richardson of Richardson, Sons, and Owden, noting that together they were involved in experiments in winter bleaching around the year 1800.⁵³

Templeton carried on for longer than the other Proprietors, becoming an inspiration to the next generation of natural science. He corresponded with leading British naturalists including Joseph Banks, William Hooker, Dawson Turner and G.B. Sowerby, and occasionally contributed to their works.⁵⁴ He left in manuscript a "Journal" (1806-25) and "Hibernian Flora," illustrated with his own watercolours. He advocated for the establishment of the Botanic Gardens in Belfast and he was an Associate of the Linnean Society.⁵⁵ His home, Cranmore House, has been preserved as it is within the soccer fields of the Belfast Academical Institute. Templeton lived his life following the same recommendations he exhorted to young natural historians in the area:

⁵² September 30, 1823, *The Belfast Newsletter*, 25.

⁵³ Gill, *The Rise of the Irish Linen Industry*, 247-8. Richardson and Hancock were the two first bleachers to keep their greens employed during the winter. The Lisburn Historical Society claims the pair won awards for their efforts, but it is not clear from which institution.

⁵⁴ Helena Chesney, "Enlightenment and Education," Foster and Chesney, eds., *Nature in Ireland: A Scientific and Cultural History*, 349.

⁵⁵ Henry Boylan, *A Dictionary of Irish Biography*, 3rd ed. (Niwot, Colorado: Roberts Rinehart, 1998).

To the most active mind, the most fertile genius, the exhaustless field of science invited to pursuits with which health of body and peace of mind are the constant attendants. Whether you trace the circling planets in their course, and investigate the laws which retain them in their orbits, or...[pursue] the animate and inanimate objects that present themselves on all sides, each subject presents such charms and gives such never failing pleasure as the votaries of gaiety and dissipation never felt. I wish I could impress it on you minds, and on the mind of every Irishman, that engaging in serious pursuits was the true means of happiness.⁵⁶

The world of the Proprietors, both mental and physical, was filled with large properties, good pedigrees, extensive monetary resources and credit, political rebellion, social infighting and court cases. The pages of *The Belfast Monthly Magazine* preserved their thoughts on the decline of the handloom linen industry, the maintenance of estates, radicalism in Belfast, the social and economic position of dissenters, the political ambivalence of the Ulster middle class and especially on the improvement of local education. Their efforts confirm that the Enlightenment had penetrated Ireland's intellectual circles and taken hold. The post-union liberal remnant as embodied in these men was progressive, articulate and prominent within their society; however, their criticisms of the colonial system were lost in the upwelling of conservatism in the wake of the Napoleonic wars.

⁵⁶ "Address to the Belfast History Society," *B.M.M.* Vol. XIII (1814), 190-1.

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